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TWO QUESTERS IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY NORTH AFRICAN DESERT: PAUL BOWLES AND IBRAHIM ALKONI

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Jane and Port in *The Sheltering Sky* (Tea in the Sahara, the movie)

<https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=tea+in+the+sahara&es>

1

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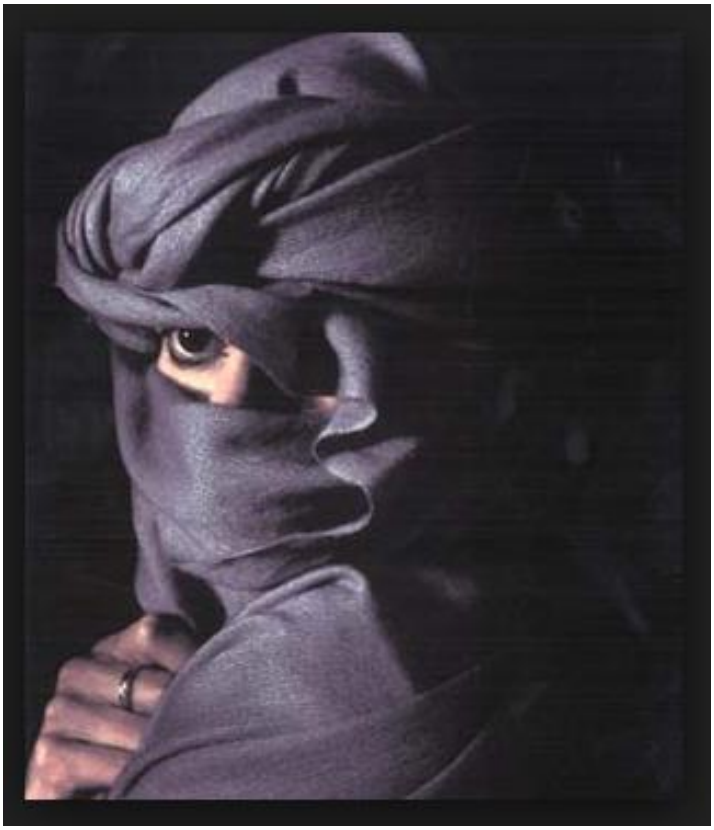

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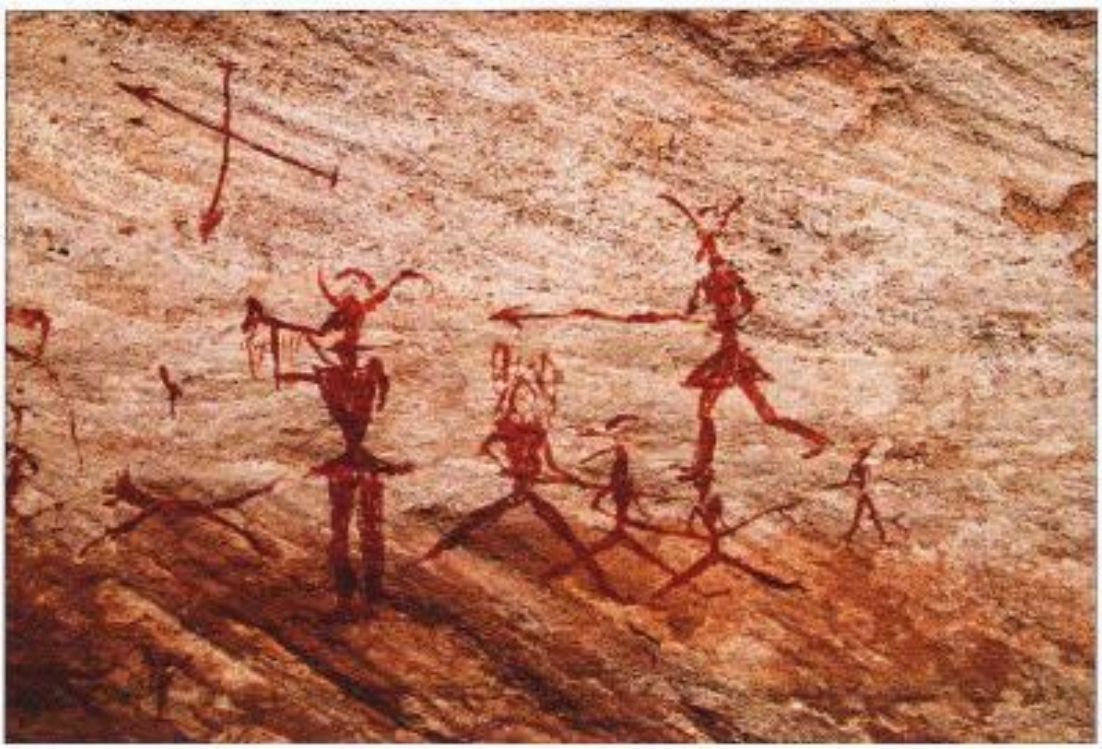
1-2-3 Jane in *The Sheltering Sky* (Tea in the Sahara, the movie)

<https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=tea+in+the+sahara&es>

Thoughts on the rock art of the Tadrart Acacus Mts., SW Libya. Savino di Lernia.

<file:///M:/desert%20paintings.pdf>



The Neolithic period is known as the New Stone Age. This ancient cave painting depicts a hunting scene in Libya.

<http://www.weapons-universe.com/Swords/The_Origins_of_Edged_Weapons.shtml>

Painted and engraved rock art and graffiti from Aharar Mellen, Acacus Mountains, Fezzan District: <blog.britishmuseum.org>

Rock-Art Sites of Tadrart Acacus.

<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/287/gallery/>

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I dedicate this thesis to

my family, my husband, Daniele, and my beloved daughter, Yasmine,

for their constant support and unconditional love. Yasmine, my work took from you three pre-school precious years, I see my crave for books transmitted to you,

my thesis is for you,

I love you all dearly

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

SS Bowles Paul, *The Sheltering Sky,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

SH Bowles Paul, *The Spider's House*, California: Black Sparrow Press, 1982.

BS Alkoni Ibrahim, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, Trans. Mayya Jayyusi and Christopher Tingley, Great Britain: Arris Books, 2003.

Anubis Alkoni Ibrahim, *Anubis: a Desert Novel*, Trans. William M. Hutchins, Cairo: The American University Press, 2005.

GD Alkoni Ibrahim, *Gold Dust,* Trans. Elliott Colla, London: Arabia Books, 2008.

MG Alkoni Ibrahim, *My Great Desert*, ʻAmmân: Muʾassasa al-ʻarabiyyah lil Dirâsât wa al- Nashr, 1998.

General Introduction

> "Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings."
>
> Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism, 7

In *Desert Divers*, Sven Lindqvist follows the Western questers' paths into the North African Sahara. In this travel book, Lindqvist confesses his ideas about the desert and refers to the well-known description the European travellers provided. He writes:

> The Moor doesn't defend his freedom, for in the desert you are always free. No visible treasures, for the desert is bare. No, the Moor defends a secret realm and that's why I admire him.[1]

Lindqvist reveals that the above-mentioned words are of Saint-Exupery, written during the French expedition in Morocco in 1927. The disclosure serves to remind the reader that the Western adventure in North Africa is nothing new. The Western explorers - Paul Bowles is one among them - found more than Saint-Exupery's nothingness and fixity of the desert to carry on fighting the 'Moors' as the writer admits. In his travel book, Lindqvist shows the historical figures who bring through the colonial apparatus to conduct their "one-sided affair with the desert."[2] The writer's fascination with the

[1] Sven Lindqvist, *Desert Divers* (UK: Granta Books, 2000), 22.

[2] Lindqvist, *Desert,* 152.

"million monotonous variations of the sandy colours"[3] expanded over while "the desert opens up around [them]."[4] This is how writing on the desert attracted these writers, who loved the desert and admitted that "in the desert all changes have already occurred. Nothing grows, nothing dies, and nothing decays. Everything has gone. Only eternity remains."[5]

Elements that contribute to the understanding of the peculiarities of the desert, like time in relation to space, nature, culture and politics are the main concerns of this thesis. The aim of this thesis is to explore, uncover, analyse and comment on the novels written by Paul Bowles and Ibrahim Alkoni.[6] This study will concentrate on the literary representation of the desert from a comparative perspective through which the Western confronts with the native explorations of what is politically considered the Arab World, while geographically labelled African and Mediterranean.

On the one hand, there is a commitment to show how Bowles' perspective witnessed a gradual shift from the Eurocentric cultural perspective, which speaks of the silent subjects of the Orient, to give free rein to the ex-colonised natives to have space in his writings and become authors of Moroccan tales. On the other hand, the endeavour is meant to explore Alkoni's conception of the desert from an 'oriental' point of view, the one that comes from within.

These two authors have two different cultural backgrounds. If Bowles belongs to the last Western generation resorting to the colonial literary genre, Alkoni writes about the ex-colonised space that needed to establish its voice and represent its own identity.

[3] Lindqvist, *Desert,* 4.

[4] Lindqvist, *Desert,* 4.

[5] Lindqvist, *Desert,* 68.

[6] The writers are presented thoroughly in the following pages.

The comparison of the two novelists will expand over two separate parts of the thesis. Each part is so structured as to explore one of the literary representations of the late twentieth-century North African desert. First, due to the different cultural backgrounds of the two writers (Bowles is American and Alkoni is North African), the strict literary context, biography and opera are analysed in the beginning of each part. Second, a summary of their selected works is given, in the opening pages of each part. Third, a fully-fledged analysis of their premises is extended to put forward their representations of the desert. Finally the concluding chapter, informed by postcolonial concepts, will bring the two writers to interact in a comparative perspective. Indeed, North Africa is an ex-colonised space, where defining identity seems to be difficult because of the presence and interplaying of a multitude of social, historical, geographical and ideological characters. For this reason, the postcolonial discourse is synchronous and coexistent with other theories and approaches that help understand the space and texts in question.

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Often postcolonial and magical realist writers destabilise the canon using a kind of "militant" aesthetics. As a result, born as a reaction to a space, social, political and historical experience, postcolonial literature is still complex to define. Its traces date back to the colonial era that started in India at least four centuries ago. In the North African context, European colonisation was much later, though the geographical area experienced continuously turbulent conquests and subduction.

The postcolonial phenomenon proves willing to operate a continuous reversal of colonial conditions. The literature under this umbrella concept, supported by a solid critical background, is engaged in targeted writing, for instance rewriting those works which are regarded as classics of the

emblematic colonial encounter from a point view of the marginalised, as evidenced by Chinua Achebe, with his *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which is considered a way of "writing back" or rewriting Africa. Postcolonial writers, as Bhabha would put it, show their inability to return to pre-colonial past and consider colonial heritage as a human linguistic and cultural enrichment.[7] Paul Bowles, the American writer, in the process of writing North Africa, faces in his work the complex issue of being the outsider-author that tells of the silenced subjects to abandon the Western superiority and become the translator-writer of stories spoken by their natives. His protagonists fight for the authentic space and against Western influence. Others, like Ibrahim Alkoni use the literary work as a vehicle for the reconsideration of the official historiography, in an attempt to reconstruct a collective memory devoid of manipulations by successive regimes before, during and after European colonialism.

Moreover, an important part of the postcolonial project is entrusted to the reconsideration of the representations of the world outside Europe that this latter has constructed from centuries ago influencing the development of colonial relationships and maintaining the European domination over the colonised territories. This is how representation plays a crucial role in the postcolonial discourse. It is often the double edged arm that, on the one hand, triggers resentment to an "inferior Other," but also fuels the desire to explore the "exotic" alternative of a rigid reality.

Therefore, one of the purposes of this study is to apply the theories of representation of postcolonial space on the North African region, which seems to be underrepresented in academia. In particular, postcolonial studies on the representation of space are perforated by new concepts and

[7] Bill Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, ed, *The Post-colonial Studies Reader,* (London, Routledge, 1995), ix.

ideas that have constantly been redefined as a sign of the viability of these debates. The same term post-colonialism is indeed a subject of debate that bears different definitions. Robert Young treats post-colonialism as an alternative to the term "Third World" and, therefore, tends to exclude such terms as "settler colonies" or "white colonies" such as Canada and Australia, on the basis of purely economic identification of the third world.[8] While Stephen Slemon considers it as a synonym of the term "Commonwealth (Literature),"[9] which generally tends to include the settler colonies and what he regarded as "the second world."[10]

The nature of the colonial phenomenon sparked the reaction of the postcolonial world. Accordingly, Ahmed Aijaz declares: "Understandably, then, it has become the project of post-colonial literatures to investigate the European textual capture and containment of colonial and post-colonial space and to intervene in that originary and continuing containment."[11] The post-colonial discourse is defined as a reaction to a cultural reading and hegemony offered by the West in its colonial process. And thus, the post-colonial answer becomes necessary to complete, chastise and rewrite the literature of the ex-colonised space.

With regards to the relationship between post-colonialism and magical realism that is going to be deepened in the second part of this thesis, the idea that magical realism as a mode happened to be coined, at least in its early decades, in the ex-colonised Latin American hemisphere says many about its reactionary form of writing to the ex-coloniser's realist mode. In the present

[8] R. J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, (New York, Routledge, 1995), 2.

[9] Slemon Stephen, "The scramble for post-colonialism", in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader,* ed. Bill Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin (London, Routledge, 1995), 104-10.

[10] Slemon Stephen, "The scramble for post-colonialism", in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader,* ed. Bill Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin (London, Routledge, 1995), 45-52.

[11] Ashcroft, *Postcolonial*, 116.

work, we will follow this same idea in the North African context. In her "Exploring Native American Culture through Conflicting Cultural Views," Jeanette Gonsior declares that magical realist writers have “in-between identities” and explore space from “inside-out.”[12] She alludes to Brenda Cooper’s argument on “Third-World cosmopolitans,” such as Vargas Llosa, Salman Rushdie, Isabelle Allende, Garcia Màrquez and Louise Erdrich, who share

> A declaration of cultural “hybridity” – a hybridity claimed to offer certain advantages in negating the collisions of language, race and art. This hybridity is at the heart of the politics and the techniques of magical realism.[13]

The same idea is expanded on by Salman Rushdie, when he stresses his being an “inescapably international writer,” referring to concepts like “cross-pollination” when he admits that

> It is perhaps one of the more pleasant freedoms of the literary migrant to be able to choose his parents. […]. A polyglot family tree, against which I measure myself, and to which I would be honoured to belong.[14]

Hybridity renders ambivalent and paradoxical texts, spaces and identities. It fascinates because it foregrounds difference against the background of the established order. In literature, hybridity pushes the discursive and generic boundaries while partially maintaining them. Speaking of hybridity in literature is to speak of identity in literature. It simply allows a continuously simultaneous crossing of the boundaries. It is in this context that we will explore the way Paul Bowles’ and Ibrahim Alkoni’s texts are hybrid and their being “inescapably international writers.”[15]

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[12] Jeanette Gonsior, “Exploring Native American Culture Through Conflicting Cultural Views,” < http://books.google.it/books?id>, (12/04/2014, 11.00), 28.

[13] Gonsior, Exploring, 28.

[14] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-9* (London: Granta Books, 1992), 21.

[15] Rushdie, *Imaginary*, 19.

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Defining the concepts of representation and hybridity will illuminate the rest of the analysis. Representation, derived "(in the sense 'image, likeness'): from Old French *représentation* or Latin *repr¿sentâtiôn*, from *repraesentare* 'bring before, exhibit'."[16], is defined as: "The action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone or the state of being so represented, the description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way, the depiction of someone or something in a work of art and synonymously as picture, model, or other depiction of someone or something."[17]

Accordingly, the idea of representation in literature can be used conversely to mean image, prejudice, cliché, stereotypes and conception of the space. Beyond the specific definitions of these concepts, the notion of representation is often considered common to all, as it derives from the awareness that they come from the attempt to represent what is different from oneself. These representations tend to easily transcend the boundaries of the literary work to approach cultural, social, political or national ensembles that would define the "I."

Representation and space studies often intertwine with postcolonial studies. Studies of post-colonialism have always been involved in the consideration of issues relating to "otherness", which represents one of the fundamental concepts of criticism and literature in this vein.

The linguistic area selected for this comparison is the literature of North Africa in English and Arabic. The decision to focus on the North African desert rests on many reasons. This space seems to be marginalised by its people's literature, while it is the object of a major interest by Western, mainly French,

[16] <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/representation>.

[17] <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/representation>.

writers. Compared to the Arabian Desert, the North African Sahara was further marginalised by English explorers and writers, mainly T.E. Lawrence, Wilfred Thesiger and many others that belong to a tradition of writers on the Orient who ignored it.

In dealing with postcolonial theory, the danger one can run in using the unidirectional definition of the theory is to replicate one of the strategies implemented by the colonising powers in representations of the territories and colonised peoples, known as the flattening of the differences:

> An equally fundamental constraint is attention to precise location. Every colonial encounter or "contact zone" is different, and each "post-colonial" occasion needs, against general background principles, to be located and analysed precisely for its specific interplay.[18]

Therefore, British colonisation, for instance in India, was different from the French one in Algeria or the Italian one in Libya. Many factors account for such differences, including the duration of the colonial period, the social and political acts on the colonised space etc. This implies that the themes and narrative strategies used to address the colonial issues are differently dependent on the geographical area.

In general, postcolonial literature is a genre of writing, which has been "affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day."[19] Although writing from formerly colonised different countries has distinctive features, postcolonial literature shares some significant concerns and characteristics that include concerns about space reclaiming and the representation of the Other.

[18] Ashcroft, *Postcolonial*, 171.

[19] Ashcroft, *Postcolonial*, 2.

On the one hand, if colonising means claiming and exploiting foreign lands, resources, and people by subduing the colonised to different forms of enslavement, indentured labour, and migration, an act that forced many native populations to move from the places that they considered "home", postcolonial literature attempts to counteract their resulting alienation from their surroundings by restoring a connection between native people and places through description, narration, and dramatization.

On the other hand, while the native populations' cultures of the countries, subjected to foreign rule, were often marginalised, suppressed, and openly denigrated in favour of the social and cultural preferences of the colonisers, much postcolonial literature seeks to assert the richness and validity of pre-colonised cultures, trying to restore identity and to decolonise the "I."

As colonisers often depicted their colonial subjects existing "outside of history" in unchanging, timeless societies, unable to progress or develop without their intervention and assistance, revising history to usher the silenced voice of the colonised is thus a major commitment of postcolonial writing. Thus, the act of representation in postcolonial studies needs to be defined as a fundamental act to promote pride and identity in culture and literature.

The representation of space is central in postcolonial criticism. It is, in fact, related to the phenomenon of what is generally interpreted as an act of 'categorisation'. This phenomenon occurs every time one thinks of the other's place not as unique and independent, but as part of a region or culture on the basis of geographical and physical characteristics (weather, life style, age, skin colour, sex, etc..) or on the basis of other characteristics (occupation, religion, etc..). In addition, the categorisation is not only a spontaneous phenomenon but is a cognitive process or mental map that the Western mind acted within its framework for centuries, "Thinking in relation

to categories is a necessary way of organizing the world in our minds, creating mental maps for working out how we view the world and negotiate our ways through it in our everyday social relations and interactions. It would be difficult to imagine how the world would seem without using general categories in speech and writing as basic tools for organizing our understanding."[20]

However, categorisation is often the basis of prejudices and negative racial and ethnic stereotypes: the categories may be more or less rational. Cultural and social categorisations are not as rational as scientific ones. Indeed, some categories such as "Italian fascists" or "male Italian Latin lover" are not based on the same degree of truth or probability. However, "our minds seem to make no distinction in category formation: irrational categories are formed as easily as rational."[21] Once formed, categories are retained in memory as cognitive representations. In particular,

> Representations consist of words and images which stand in for various social groups and categories. They provide ways of describing and at the same time of regarding and thinking about these groups and categories.[22]

Such representations, also called group prototypes, contain the associations between a specific category ("colonised") and traits that are assigned to this category ("primitive"). This implies that, in the moment in which it is exposed to the category, associated traits are activated immediately as they are present in the cognitive representation stored in memory.

What is described implies that categorising or representing (assigning certain traits to groups and places and consider those traits as "intrinsic" to

[20] Michael Pickering, *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* (Palgrave: NY, 2001), 2.

[21] Pickering, *Stereotyping*, 19.

[22] Pickering, *Stereotyping*, 22.

the members of each group) is a completely natural phenomenon, as it is used to represent those categories around the world. To categorise, in this respect, is more allocating and judging rather than defining and describing.

Hence, the cataloguing of the rest of the world grew from the early texts that enact the colonial encounter, in which all new information on the cultures encountered by colonisers (explorers, anthropologists, missionaries, etc.) were encapsulated in the category of the Other, which is constantly enriched with new traits, derived from the comparison with the category "we."

Initially, these texts are configured as the forerunners of what would later become the genre of colonial literature, describing a strange and exotic world. These representations were dictated by the need on the part of Western colonisers to understand the world and "come to terms" with diversity, leading to interpreting, understanding, comparing and categorising the Other's space.

The construction of the image of the Other was so addressed to the exaltation of difference, which became at once reason and justification of colonial rule and, therefore, required actions aimed at its civilising. Colonisation took on the appearance of an attempt to standardise the world outside Europe, which is central to Paul Bowles' interpretation of the North African space. Emblematic of this process of homogenising and flattening of diversity was also the system that Bowles fights in his novels.

Coming close to the space, where the sexed, dehumanised and silenced Other dwells, the Western traveller is confronted by two conflicting realities. The one reality is the sum of ideas input by his culture from an early age. The second is the reality perceived in a lively moment, yet conceived by the explorer's cultural background. This same idea is elaborated by Rania

Kabbani's *Europe's Myth of the Orient* that traces the possible common features of Western voyagers in the Middle-East as a space of possibilities,

> Europe was charmed by an Orient that shimmered with possibilities that promised a sexual space from the dictates of the bourgeois morality of the metropolis. The European reacted to the encounter as a man might react to a woman, by manifesting strong attraction or strong repulsion. E. W. Lane described his first sight of Egypt, the Egypt he had dreamed of since boyhood, thus: "as I approached the shore, I felt like an eastern bridegroom, about to lift the veil of his bride […].[23]

In fact, in confronting the Orient, the traveller sees his preconception of the territory. It is important, however, to highlight the idea that the Orient and its derivative concepts are used in the following corpus as inclusive of the North African region, which is often depicted as completely different from the rest of the Arab wold from a Berber, African and Mediterranean perspective.

The many possibilities that the Orient offers to the visitor seem to include Western inhibitions rather than a real recreation of space. Identity and difference are often the controversies that the writer on the Orient faces. The "mysterious" space becomes the Other, who resists meaning of the colonising culture and rejects its power to define. The Western concept of the orient is based, as Abdul JanMohamed argues, on the *Manichean allegory* (seeing the world as divided into mutually excluding opposites): "if the west is ordered, rational, masculine, good, then the orient is chaotic, irrational, feminine, and evil. Simply to reverse this polarizing is to be complicit in its totalizing and identity-destroying power (all is reduced to a set of dichotomies, black or white, etc.)."[24]

Colonised peoples are depicted diverse in their nature and in their traditions, and their world is often explained by a geographical division of the planet, in

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[23] Rania Kabbani, *Europe's Myth of the Orient,* (London: Pandora Press, 1986), 67.

[24] S.X. Goudie, "Theory, Practice and the Intellectual: A Conversation with Abdul R. JanMohamed," <http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v1i2/GOUDIE.HTM> (13/09/2014).

which people are “totalised” or “essentialised” -- through such concepts as a black consciousness, Indian soul, aboriginal culture and so forth. In this respect, it is important to refer to Homi Bhabha on the complex issue of representation and meaning from his article in Greenblatt and Gun's *Redrawing the Boundaries*,

> Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement, whether they are the middle passage of slaver and indenture, the voyage out of the civilizing mission, the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the West after the Second World War, or the traffic of economic and political refugees within and outside the Third World. Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement [...] make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather complex issue. It becomes crucial to distinguish between the semblance and similitude of the symbols across diverse cultural experiences -- literature, art, music, ritual, life, death -- and the social specificity of each of these productions of meaning as they circulate as signs within specific contextual locations and social systems of value.[25]

However, it is no coincidence that the two literary works considered most representative of the "colonial encounter, *The Tempest* (1623) and R*obinson Crusoe* (1719), enact the arrival of Europeans in uninhabited territories, which are not really uninhabited, and of which they declare themselves the masters, depriving the native peoples of their right to their land. In the Orient the first impact is different in that the territories are partially emptied, but completely silenced. In silencing their subjects, the travellers in the desert fill into a linguistic void and speak on behalf of the native inhabitants.

Therefore, the construction of specific images of the Other was functional in the support and implementation of the various projects that made up the program of the colonial enterprise. Colonial discourse theory has been

[25] John Lye, *Some Issues in Postcolonial Theory*, (1997), <http://www.brocku.ca/english/courses/4F70/postcol.php,> (13/09/2014), 2.

primarily built upon the pioneering work of Edward Said. In *Orientalism* (1978), Said examines a range of literary, anthropological and historical texts in order to illuminate how the West attempted to represent the Orient as Other through Orientalist discourse. By portraying the East as culturally and intellectually inferior, the West was simultaneously able to construct an image of western superiority. In order to sustain these beliefs, objective statements were produced in a manner similar to realism so that they seemed to contain truth-value. These opposing representations of East and West were further reinforced by imperial power relations, which enabled the West to justify their process of colonisation as a 'civilizing mission.'[26]

Said's work is configured as a critical theory on the representation of the Other that has most influenced the post-colonial criticism, establishing itself as one of its founding texts. It laid the groundwork for the emergence of the critical current. This section focuses on the theory of creation and description of the East as it was outlined by the West in Said's *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*.

Said believes that Orientalism therefore should not be understood as a product of colonialism, because the first, actually, precedes the latter. Said repeatedly stresses that Orientalism is not, by itself, caused by colonialism, but also states that the complex ideological apparatus and representation of the east by part of Europe has been one of the major thrusts of the colonial experience. Said offers one main definition of Orientalism. It refers to the possibility of considering Orientalism as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[27] Said implies that Orientalism is a cultural fabric rather than a natural or geographical fact. In

[26] Said, *Orientalism*, 5-25.

[27] Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

fact, the space is not only created but also "Orientalized" by the West, and hence he tries to debunk and depict the spurious claim on otherness.

An important interpretation of Said's concept of Orientalism comes from Homi Bhabha. To this latter, the colonial discourse is based on the concept of "fixity" in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation. Bhabha says:

> It connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated...[28]

Therefore, despite the play on demonization and desiring in the colonial system, which is crucial to its exercise of power, colonial discourse produces the colonised as a fixed and totalised subject, "It employs a system of representation, a regime of truth that is structurally similar to Realism."[29] Referring to Said ideas about the way the West intervenes within that system of representation by calling for a scrutiny of the varied European discourses, which represent "'the Orient' as a unified racial, geographical, political and cultural zone of the world,"[30] Bhabha agrees with Said's designation

> Orientalism very generally is a form of radical realism; anyone employing orientalism, which is the habit for dealing with questions, objects, qualities and regions deemed Oriental, will designate, name, point to, fix what he is talking or thinking about with a word or phrase, which then is considered either to have acquired, or more simply to be reality.... The tense they

[28]Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: Homi Bhabha Reconsiders the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse", This article is a revision of a paper given at the Sociology of Literature Conference, Essex University, (1982), Francis Barker Ed. *The Politics of Theory,* Colchester, 1983, http://courses.washington.edu/com597j/pdfs/bhabha_the%20other%20question.pdf, (03/10/2014), 1.

[29] Bhabha, *Other,* 1.

[30] Bhabha, *Other,* 1.

> employ is the timeless eternal; they convey an impression of repetition and strength.[31]

The realism generated by the colonial discourse is the debate of the present corpus. Both Alkoni and Bowles express the desire for an originality which is threatened by the Westernisation of the Orient. The same idea of difference is chastised by Bhabha, who declares that the rejection of difference, in the coloniser's discourse, "turns the colonial subject into a misfit - a grotesque mimicry or 'doubling' […]. The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality."[32] The act of representation furnishes the debate on postcolonial theory with a pre-colonial, quasi one of the camps that paved the way to legitimise colonial atrocities.

However, the colonial erasure of the pre-existing culture proved successful to a certain point. One can see the revival of the pre-colonial tradition in the postcolonial literature of many countries of the world, the magical realist text is set at the centre of this genre of writing that is often vehement to ensure that a return to the past is a way to regain identity and pride rather than joining the universal walk towards modernisation. It is the idea that both the writers of our interest tried to glorify in their works. Their reactions are against the intellectual closure and the oppressive act to make of the ex-colonised culture "closed, fixed in the colonial status, caught in the yolk of oppression. Both present and mummified, it testifies against its members. The cultural mummification leads to a mummification of individual thinking."[33]

In the core of the postcolonial thinking, space is given a central position. Man and his dwelling occupy the major seat in the construction of "otherness."

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[31] Bhabha, *Other,* 8.

[32] Bhabha, *Other,* 8.

[33] Bhabha, *Other,* 9.

Yet, space is a broader concept that is not uniquely represented in the postcolonial discourse. After a close scrutiny of Gaston Bachelar's *La Poetique de l'Espace*, one deduces that dealing with the desert requires a completely different approach from the intimate space this precious book develops. In fact, the desert is often considered nobody's limitless and timeless space.

In the following part, there is an exploration of the theories that shaped our perception of space. Edward Said treats "the poetics and politics of space,"[34] offering a "spatial metaphoric" in the construction of identity. He argues that "through the universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is theirs."[35] He insists on the idea that to construct identity it "involves establishing 'opposites' and others,"[36] who are called by their geographical belonging and pointed to on world map. Indeed, Said is less involved with "the poetics and the psychoanalytics than in the politics of space."[37] Said's argument is built upon the centrality of power relations, in the 'contest' of "the construction of identity through the poetics of space."[38] The power of the Orientalist discourse, accordingly, is based on the representation of space.

Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, in their *Thinking Space,* highlight the broad aspect of space consideration, when they admit "Space is the everywhere of modern thought. It is the flesh that flatters the bones of theory. It is an all-purpose nostrum […]."[39] In considering space, Crang and Thrift insist on the

[34] Derek Gregory, "Edward Said's Imaginative Geographies," in Thinking Space, ed. Mie crang and Nigel Thrift, (Routledge: London, 2000), 313.

[35] Gregory, Edward, 313.

[36] Gregory, Edward, 313.

[37] Gregory, Edward, 314.

[38] Gregory, Edward, 315.

[39] Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, Ed., *Thinking Space*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 1.

impossibility to deal with such concept without considering time as they argue "space is exceedingly difficult to write about shorn of its relation to time."[40] In fact, to deal with a timeless space, foregrounded earlier, is one of the colonial claims about the colonies and in the present work recalls colonisation and its posts when related to time. The novelist of our interest are twentieth-century (Alkoni is still alive), they started writing after the Second World War. Their works are not the outcome of a long tradition, but it enacts a space in 'process' or a continual change. It is an indicative of "the passage points in current writing on space, all of which in one sense or the other move away from the Kantian perspective on space- as an absolute category- towards *space as process* or *in process* (that is space and time combined in becoming)."[41]

In fact, the North Africa of the period in which Bowles wrote his texts witnessed the activist movements towards independence, last decades of colonisation, its intellectual elite spreading, its own voice rising, and the post-independence delusion and malaise. In that period, the otherness of the Westerner in the Maghreb was further enhanced and became unwelcomed by the natives who, for millennia, used to see the outsider as a guest to whom they had to prove generous. Then, hostility to the outsider is so deeply rooted that North African people unconsciously call Westerners "guerra," in colloquial language, an Italian word that means war. For Bhabha, "the colonial space is therefore an agonistic space. Despite the 'imitation' and 'mimicry,' with which colonised peoples cope with the imperial presence, the relationship becomes one of constant, if implicit, contestation and opposition."[42] Thus, a Westerner's presence is synonymous to threat and

[40] Crang, *Thinking,* 1.

[41] Crang, *Thinking,* 3.

[42] Ashcroft, *Postcolonial*, 28.

war. This idea is enacted by Bowles in his literature that expresses his deep concern and perfect understanding of society. Space timeless, in this prospect, is approached differently by Bowles, Alkoni and the colonialist discourse.

Timelessness of the ex-colonised space, in the colonialist discourse, is often described as a way to put the ex-colonised countries out of the historical march and describe them as un-civilised, in the absence of manuscripts in the understandable logic and language of the coloniser. In Bowles' texts, timelessness takes the quester for aesthetics to an authentic living, still uncontaminated by the civilisation he evaded in New York. In Alkoni's work, timelessness means the circularity in time, a past that is present, ever-lasting ancestral wisdom, an act that defies the notion of time as defined by a Eurocentric discourse. The same idea of the need for historicity as defined, in the ex-colonised spaces, is expressed by Bhabha's "a conception of the native as historical subject and agent of an oppositional discourse is needed."[43]

Frantz Fanon describes the process that the "native intellectual" follows in representing himself through writing space. He observes that ex-colonised intellectuals used to write in order to 'charm,' to 'denounce' the oppressor and to enter Western history and declare their humanity through addressing the Other in the Other's language.[44] One notices the way Alkoni's texts address humanity and seek universality, as a way to deconstruct the idea of the evil coloniser; when he shows that evil is human nature (manifesting itself in Cain and Dudu as it is argued in part II). Bowles, also, deconstructs the idea of evil and violence as generated by the coloniser to tell of human

[43] Ashcroft, *Postcolonial*, 63.

[44] Ashcroft, *Postcolonial*, 170.

nature that rejoices in blood and culminates in death. Fanon argues, "Now the native writer progressively takes on the habit of addressing his own people. It is only from that moment that we can speak of a national literature. […]. It is a literature of combat, because it moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space."[45]

Indeed, Alkoni's literature proves to be a "literature of combat" because it fights the ex-coloniser's and a present settler's erasure of a whole ancient past, a post-colonial present, where people do not know the human value of scripts on monumental stones and enjoy destroying them as they enjoy slaughtering mythical creatures without reason. On the other hand, Bowles' literature of combat confronts globalisation, the danger of the expansion of modernity and the price that desert people pay in this devouring process. Yet, it is worth noting that the colonial figure in Bowles' texts is the French in an Arab territory; while, for Alkoni, the coloniser is the outsider to the Berber desert, whether Italian or Arab. This idea leads to deconstructing the belief in one centre of power accumulation and foregrounds space against the background of the ideas about space.

Next we will deepen our understanding of this post-colonial space aspect in selected works of Paul Bowles and Ibrahim Alkoni.

[45] Ashcroft, *Postcolonial*, 172.

I

Paul Bowles: the Western Quester for Identity

Introduction

> "[All my characters] are all the professor... what I wanted to tell was the story of what the desert can do to us. The desert is the protagonist."[46]

> "Right away when I got here I said to myself —Ah, this is the way people used to be, the way my own ancestors were thousands of years ago.
>
> - Paul Bowles, *The Spider's House*.

Paul Bowles is probably one of the best twentieth-century American writers on the exploration of new spaces. By leaving New York and settling down in Morocco, Bowles looked for discovering a different space, and rediscovering his identity. The historical period (following the Great Wars or "the Atomic Age" as Bowles liked to call it) urged many writers to question everything, and Bowles' work answered a cultural need for the quest for identity. However, before dealing with Bowles' novels, short stories and translations, a brief presentation is perhaps useful in order to find out whether his biography is echoed in his texts.

On 30 December 1910, Paul Frederic Bowles was born to Rena Winnewisser Bowles and Claude Dietz Bowles in Jamaica, New York. The young Bowles seemed to have a terrible childhood as he was all the time on his own, his family socialised rarely, and his father seemed to apply scientific ethics in every detail of his family's life (Caponi recalls one eating scene when Paul was

[46] Paul Bowles, *In touch: the letters of Paul Bowles*, ed. Jeffrey Miller, (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994), 119-121.

punished if he chewed less than fourteen times).[47] His mother used to read Hawthorne's *Tales*, Poe's stories of mystery and imagination and Arthur Machen,[48] "creating a powerful emotional mixture in the boy of attraction, revulsion, horror, and endless fascination".[49] His father's rigid education based on orderly well-measured routine and his mother's enhancement of his artistic creativity (in drawing, writing and reading) paved the way for Paul Bowles' literary vision.

Bowles' view of order and linear behaviour put him at odds with the establishment at school: "he saw the restrictive academic atmosphere as a continuing and disturbing echo of his father's rigid behavioural codes, and he did all he could to rebel".[50] According to Foltz, Caponi and Luçanno, Bowles' early contacts and school life as a particular student with his own preference of the eccentric deepened the clash with the other students and paved the way for his future of expatriate. It was an early manifestation of his being the "outsider," which shaped all his life and fiction. In this respect, Lucanno quotes Bowles when he admits: "I think one is always writing about oneself. Nevertheless, you are writing about transformations of experience. In good writing, the works come out as something very difficult from the experience itself."[51] Music is the other face of Bowles' artistic career as he excelled from

[47] Anne Foltz, "Paul Bowles", (Summer 2000), The Review of Contemporary Fiction, ed. Jelena O. Krstovic (Vol. 98. Detroit: Gale, 2007) <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA17156449&v=2.1&u=wash89460&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w>, (11 May 2012), 84.

[48] Foltz, *Paul*, 88.

[49] Gena Dagel Caponi, *Paul Bowles: Romantic Savage* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1994), 27. Caponi tried to show how earlier influences on Bowles explained later choices in his literature.

[50]Foltz, *Paul*, 81

[51] Christopher Sawyer-Lucanno, *An Invisible Spectator: A Biography of Paul Bowles*, (London: Paladin Press, 1990), 273.

a young age, "receiving private instruction in theory, sight singing, ear training, and piano technique."[52]

In 1928, under a false identity, Bowles succeeded in publishing several poems in a journal alongside the work of James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, and André Gide. He described his happiness,

> I had imagined the moment so many times that the reality was almost like a déjà vu. I jumped into the air and let out a shout of triumph. ... My joy and excitement were such that I remember little else about the spring of 1928.[53]

That summer he was preparing to enter the University of Virginia. In March 1929, Bowles set sail for France searching for an encouraging atmosphere in what he believed to be the cradle of culture and arts. It was there that he discovered his urgent need to leave the United States for good. There and then, his quest began. A first recognition of his talent came soon.

He went back to the old continent in 1931. Afterwards, he was a guest poetry editor for *The Messenger* when he met Gertrude Stein in her famous *salon*. He was then introduced to Jean Cocteau and Ezra Pound. Thanks to Stein Bowles met Virgil Thomson, Eugène Jolas[54] and André Gide.

The same year, Bowles went to Tangier where he was immediately 'intoxicated' by the Moroccan landscape. Foltz declares

> [Bowles was] enamored by the magical quality of the landscape as well as by the sense it was culturally very far removed from the West. This strong sense of cultural isolation that Bowles found so engaging ultimately drove Copland back to Europe, and alone, Bowles resumed work on his music between visits to the more remote sections of the country.[55]

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[52] Foltz, *Paul*, 92.

[53] Bowles, *Without*, 72.

[54] Foltz, *Paul*, 94. The editor of *Transition*, the magazine where he first published his poems.

[55] Foltz, *Paul*, 94.

This visit was interrupted by a return to London for a concert of new music, featuring work by Copland and Roger Sessions, but the concert also included pieces by Virgil Thomson and Bowles. Thus, by the end of 1931, Bowles had not only become acquainted with a number of the century's leading figures but also heard his own music performed and found his future home. For the next five years, Bowles made a name for himself by working on composition and travelling to Europe, North Africa and Central and South America.

In early 1937 Bowles met Jane Auer and married her in 1938. Their story triggered curiosity for its particular details. Foltz describes their union in the following words,

> Regardless of the details of their intimate life together--details continually debated in their respective biographies--the two clearly had a strong emotional bond which bridged the separate and independent lives they maintained before and after their marriage...[56]

In 1939, Jane and Paul joined the Communist Party, an event that is echoed by Stenham of *The Spider's House*. Their journeys abroad had started with their extended honeymoon. Throughout the 1940s, Bowles travelled frequently as part of his musical career; he then knew Tennessee Williams and Ned Rorem. Until 1943, he was a composer and a critic of the music he was working on. In 1944, he turned back to fiction and started writing his short stories when he received a book advance from Doubleday and, responding to the lure of North Africa once again, he left for Tangier in 1947.[57]

The next decade was decisive in Bowles' life and fiction. He settled in Morocco and wrote his highly acclaimed novel *The Sheltering Sky.* While he was devouring the North African landscape in search of fictive enchantment,

[56] Foltz, *Paul*, 102.

[57] Foltz, *Paul*, 102.

"Antheil had regaled Bowles with tales of the Sahara. En route, he met some French […]; one of them was enthusiastic about a town called […] located in particularly barren region of the Sahara called the M'zab. […]. He contacted the French army's regional commander, a lieutenant d'Amagnac, who quickly found Bowles a house near the army post, […]. He also sent him a servant, a one-eyed Algerian, to do the cooking."[58] His journeys and way of life inspired his fiction. For instance, Tunner, one of his travellers in *The Sheltering Sky*, is modelled on George Turner another American, aged twenty-three, with whom he travelled across the Algerian desert, where they discovered the naked dancers that Bowles is going to allude to in *The Sheltering Sky*.[59]

In 1950, his first volume of short stories, The *Delicate Prey and Other Stories* appeared. In 1952, another novel entitled *Let It Come Down* appeared on the literary scene. Then Bowles' interest in the Moroccan tradition fuelled his craving for more authentic information. He developed friendships with native artists whose attitudes remoulded the poetic vision of Bowles and had a direct influence on his fiction. From his distant exile, Bowles expressed his way of visualising life in the "here-there" dichotomy to Oliver Evans in an interview he gave in the 1970s:

> It's wonderful that here there are those little … rocks in the brook that just stay there while everything else rushes by them in the water, people who just stand or sit all day while time goes by and people go by. That's the proof that life goes on, somehow, whereas in New York there isn't any proof. It's all going by, nothing going on.[60]

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[58] Sawyer-Lucanno, *An Invisible,* 142. All the elements and details make part of *The Sheltering Sky*.

[59]Sawyer-Lucanno, *An Invisible,* 144.

[60] Allen Hibbard, "The Man Who Walked to the Moon." The Review of Contemporary Fiction 18.1 (1998), in Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, (Vol. 209. Detroit: Gale, 2009) <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA17156449&v=2.1&u=wash89460&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w > (11 May 2012), 159.

In 1957 Jane Bowles started a series of strokes and psychic sickness that gradually ended her life and took most of Bowles time. After Jane, Paul was terribly affected and started mainly his translation career that flourished from the Sixties on.

Paul Bowles died in 1999 at the age of 88 in Tangier, Morocco. Tangier had been his home for the 52 years of his life.

****

The following is an introduction to the novels by Bowles which are the focus of the present work. *The Sheltering Sky* is Bowles' early important novel in depicting Paul Bowles' quest in the North African desert and the way he sees the desert as 'protagonist'. This selection favours the novels and short stories where the desert is the predominant setting. Other texts serve as a general background that covers the North African area and our understanding of its political, economic and spiritual situations. The work covers cities and villages that are often an extension of the desert. In this respect, *The Spider's House* helps widen the scope on Bowles' literature in general. It sets forth the encounter between the West and North Africa, as well as the maturation of Bowles' ideas. In the beginning, Bowles depicts the desert from a western and alien point of view as the epitome of difference in landscape and culture. Following the English and Orientalist traditions, as it is explained in the introductory chapter, the desert is described as exotic, empty and silent. One needs to observe whether or not Bowles affiliates with these traditions to find out what is original in his writings. The focus is on the maturational process of Bowles' treatment of the North African desert, in his consideration of space and identity.

Bowles' first novel, *The Sheltering Sky*, is perhaps typical of most of his fiction. Three Americans, Kit and Port Moresby and Tunner, have, with various

motives, turned their backs on the United States and plunged into the wildest parts of North Africa. Port is the character leading the journey that Tunner considers to be a colourful expedition and an opportunity to seduce Kit. Nevertheless, Port is driven by an inner voice and a sadness which he never evades. He is the postmodern wanderer from one place to another, despising the traces of civilisation. His quest and path of exile lead him through a heap of broken experiences: an affair with a native prostitute, solitary peregrinations of self-exploration and intense moments with his wife Kit. Finally, when the two of them succeed in meeting and melting in a remote isolation, a delirium of typhoid kills Port, a death that confirms his ideas: "For in order to avoid dealing with relative values, he had long since come to deny all-purpose to the phenomenon of existence--it was more expedient and more comforting."[61] After Port's death, Kit tunes with desert moonlight (recalling the scene in which she bathes naked by moonlight and then walks into the heart of the desert). Kit then calls on to two nomads, offers them her body, which is naturalised by a new desert identity, willingly becoming the concubine of Belqassim, the younger of the two natives. He takes her to his home, southward, where she lives disguised as a man, respected by her mate wives, until they discover the truth; only then, they react aggressively in a frenzy of jealousy. She decides to leave to Oran only to disappear again into the Casbah.

Port is the protagonist, who sets for the difficult discovery in North Africa. He is a complex character, who detonates to face complications and downfall. To all this was added the limits ingrained in Kit's nature, with her marked days, "when from the moment she came out of sleep, she could feel doom hanging

[61] Bowles, *SS*, 26.

over her head like a low rain cloud."[62] Still, there were curious moments of complicity between Kit and Port,

> Kit took Port's hand. They climbed in silence, happy to be together. [...] It was such places as this, such moments that he loved above all else in life; she knew that, and she also knew that he loved them more if she could be there to experience them with him. [...] It was as if always he held the fresh hope that she too would be touched in the same way as he by solitude and the proximity of infinite things.[63]

Nevertheless, her fear, a radical anxiety, was always impending. From the beginning of the journey, she hated the difference. Her passes were uncomfortable, sickened and horrified by the idea of the desert and its people. When Port dies, the fears that had blinded her seem to leave her.

> "You know," said Port, and his voice sounded unreal, as voices are likely to do after a long pause in an utterly silent spot, "the sky here's very strange. I often have the sensation when I look at it that it's a solid thing up there, protecting us from what's behind." Kit shuddered slightly as she said: "From what's behind?" "Yes." "But what is behind?" Her voice was very small. "Nothing, I suppose. Just darkness. Absolute night." "Please don't talk about it now." There was agony in her entreaty.[64]

Another novel, *The Spider's House*, is of crucial importance to the present analysis in that it shows the desert as part of the twentieth century Nationalist struggle for freedom. In this novel, Bowles seems to have gained a major understanding of the North African culture by developing a mature social, political and cultural opinion. He also departs from the tradition he carried on with *The Sheltering Sky*, in his choice of the realistic vein rather than the romance genre and by giving voice to the native protagonist Amar.

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[62] Bowles, *SS*, 14.

[63] Bowles, *SS*, 36.

[64] Bowles, SS, 37.

In *The Spider's House,* there are two central characters: Amar, a Moroccan boy, and John Stenham, an American writer who lives in Fez. The novel begins with a prologue involving Stenham. Then Stenham's story is abruptly interrupted while the story of Amar is developed. The narrative on Amar, in its turn, is suspended, and the reader, taken back to Stenham, starts to wonder if these characters will ever meet. They do, in a long section climaxing with a journey outside Fez to the annual festival of sacrifice. Stenham and his she-friend take Amar and his friend Mohammed with them. The festival occupies much the same place in the structures of *The Spider's House* as the night walk and the train scenes in *The Sheltering Sky*. It is a journey into potential danger, chaos, and unreason. Stenham and the girl separate from Amar, and for a time the narrative breaks apart again. The novel ends with a moving scene in which the Americans, on their way to Casablanca to escape the revolutionary violence of Fez, drop Amar in one of the streets, while he continues to run after the fast car.

This ending dramatizes the destructive legacy of colonialism and the difficulty of cultural reconciliation, but it also serves another function. Neither Amar's story nor Stenham's is closed off or resolved. Stenham is on his way to an uncertain future with a new love-story; Amar remains behind in the increasing turmoil of a society at a moment of radical change. Moreover, the two plots are certainly not completely fused: after a period of growing together, they veer apart. Indeed, the plot of the novel gives the impression of unravelling at the end, or of falling open, exposing its externality.

The Spider's House, according to Bowles' epigraph from the Koran, is the insubstantial house of the infidel. However, Bowles' novel, like most of his fiction, tells that settling down in a place is like being trapped in a spider's

house. There is no permanent shelter for Amar, who faces a vanished home, an empty road and a vacant sky at the end of *The Spider's House*.

The Spider's House is Bowles' epitome of the encounter West/North Africa; though not set in the desert its politics cover the whole area. The novel's main concern is native and Western lives suddenly changed by the independence war, the political awareness and violence and the whole uprooting of the region by the highly advanced Western presence. Bowles successfully depicts the traditional or what Stenham calls "medieval life" of the old Moroccan town: the *Madina* of Fez. At that time, the 1950s, Fez was already on its way of becoming Western. Fez of *The Spider's House* is depicted as a medley of French rule, Moroccan nationalist *Istiqlal* party, traditionalist and Europeanised natives, Westerners of different cultures.

Set in Fez during the first moments of the upheavals that announced a more radical and violent phase of the Moroccan struggle for independence, the narrative seems not merely prescient but positively eerie in its evocation of a climate in which every aspect of daily life is affected - and deformed - by the *roiling* of nationalism, by the legacy of colonialism, and by chaotic political and cultural strife. In fact, critics like Bhabha and Chatterjee admit that the nationalist claim to modernity, as a solution to follow the Western steps towards "an autonomous or sovereign form of political rationality," is problematic in the case of adhering to postcolonial ideas as

> Nationalism…seeks to represent itself in the image of the Enlightenment and fails to do so. For Enlightenment itself, to assert its sovereignty as the universal ideal, needs its Other; if it could ever actualise itself in the real world as the truly universal, it would in fact destroy itself.[65]

[65] Bhabha, "Dissemination: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation", in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, Achcroft et al., 195.

According to these writers, nationalism is a contradictory process because it aims at recovering a national identity and pride using a Eurocentric discourse to which it reacted initially. Bowles believed in the same idea of Bhabha, when he abhorrently reacted to colonisation and nationalism, in his novels.

Bowles, through Stenham, launches a critique of nationalism that agrees with the ideas presented above by postcolonial theorists. According to Bowles, nationalism is a process that enhances backwardness and admits that the unique way to exist is the Western. In fact, losing one's particularity and originality for the sake of an international trend is to Bowles' discourse a waste of one's heritage and identity, as further analysis will focus on.

However, many of Bowles' texts revolve around the theme of encounters between Western and Third World cultures. The perspective from which the stories are told gradually changes during the course of his career. That is, the perspective from which the stories are told gradually moves from that of the Westerner to that of the North African characters. In his earlier works of fiction, such as *The Sheltering Sky*, the narrative unfolds through the eyes and voices of the Westerners. In his later works, one no longer views the North African natives through the eyes of the Westerners but the Westerners through the eyes of the natives. This pattern is distinct in Bowles' fiction and non-fiction; for example the material he has translated assumes the Moroccan perspective and voice.

Beginning in the late 1940s and continuing over several decades, Bowles translated a significant number of Moroccan tales into English. This process completely eliminates the Western element of the story and causes the reader, as Bowles himself apparently has to some degree, to assume the perspective of the cultural Other. He says,

> Morocco epitomized this contradictory space, being both a timeless world of magic and tradition and a dynamic, ever-changing place, a cultural

> crossroads, an Inter[contact]zone mixing strict Muslim culture with the experimentalism of the Euro-American avant-garde, in a geographical space where Europe and Africa met and a complex web of histories intersected.[66]

One of the attractions of Tangiers for Bowles was its mixture of cultures, where one might "run into a Polish refugee... an American construction worker... a tailor from Rome," and where "the past and the present exist simultaneously in proportionate degree, where a very much alive today is given an added depth of reality by the presence of an equally alive yesterday."[67] This idea is developed by Neil Campbell, in his "Dialogic Encounters and Hybrid Routes in the Fiction, Travel Writing, and Translations of Paul Bowles," where he explores Tangier, Morocco and North Africa as a meeting place of simultaneity: a "contact zone" (recalling Bakhtin and Pratt). The place is a pot for melting multiple identities, cultures and traditions, "producing unstable but exciting new conditions."[68] Thus, when Bowles claimed that Tangier was "an enormous market" where goods, information, and people were "bought and sold ... unloaded and reloaded ... without valid documents to identify them,"[69] he echoed Pratt's "contact zone" as a magnetic spot of endowing, becoming and altering. In this uneasy dialogue, Bowles' characters question their identities, old assumptions and

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[66] Richard F. Patteson, "The External World of Paul Bowles"(1984), in Perspectives on Contemporary Literature (Vol. 209. Detroit: Gale, 2009) 16-22 <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA17156449&v=2.1&u=wash89460&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w > (11 May 2012), 16-22. Bowles' friend William Burroughs called Tangiers the "Interzone" in his novel *Naked Lunch*, and Beat writers like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg visited it in the 1960s.

[67] Paul Bowles, "The Worlds of Tangier," (Holiday, 23 March, 1958), <http://littlestarjournal.com/blog/2011/08/paul-bowles-inside-the-cafes-and-salons-of-morocco/> (22/10/2014, 21:20), 68.

[68] Neil Campbell, "Dialogic Encounters and Hybrid Routes in the Fiction, Travel Writing, and Translations of Paul Bowles", in *Short Story Criticism*. Ed. W. Kaufman et al., (Maryland: University Press of America, 2000) <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA17156449&v=2.1&u=wash89460&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w > (12/12/2013), 176.

[69] Bowles, *Worlds*, 69.

values. “In Bowles' later work these dialogic encounters become central as the cultures hybridize through his translations and stories”[70].

Concerning the presence of biographical elements in his fiction and as he had already done in *The Sheltering Sky*, Bowles deviates once more from faithfully indulging his autobiography in his fiction. In *The Spider’s House*, Stenham did with Amar the opposite of how Bowles behaved with his Moroccan friends when he first met them. In his life, Bowles had friendships with Moroccan natives. While Stenham stifled his first lustful gaze at Amar while the young boy bathed in the fountain by leaving him behind in Morocco and leaving with Polly, Bowles had lifelong affairs with many of his Moroccan friends with whom he ventured in his mystic quest for an original interpretation of the space.

The way *The Sheltering Sky* and *The Spider’s House* are told is different from the rest of Bowles’ novels. *The Sheltering Sky* can be compared to romance and adventure novels like Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim* or Kipling’s *Romance of the Empire*. *The Sheltering Sky* is the romance of self-discovery where space - the desert as its beating heart - is distinguished and aggrandised. Next, *The Sheltering Sky* is analysed from the perspective of the tradition of writing romance, in colonial and postcolonial periods. This consideration puts emphasis on the idea of the I versus the Other.

[70] Campbell, Dialogic, 182.

The quest for the I and the Other in the desert

> "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."
>
> -- Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*

> "If I'm persuaded that our life is predicated upon violence, that the entire structure of what we call civilization, the scaffolding that we've built up over the millennia, can collapse at any moment, then whatever I write is going to be affected by that assumption."
>
> -- Paul Bowles, *Unwelcome Words*

Man's self-fulfilment has always been one of his most intriguing preoccupations. For a long-time and to the present moment, myth has been the most expressive form in which to communicate man's aspiration to completeness. What people long for in Ulysses, Moses, Jesus, Pharaohs, Mohammed is the myth of man's superiority over nature, other men and himself. Laurence Coupe, in his book *Myth*, states that "both making Myth and reading myths imply a drive toward completion."[71] Northrop Frye believes that the form that brought up the birth of art, especially literature, is myth. This view is shared also by Coupe who insists on "the modes of literary

[71] Laurence Coupe, *Myths*, (London-New York: Routledge, 1997), 6.

narrative" as an outcome of "the logic of displacement" or "the adaptation of myth […] to canons of morality […]."[72]

In this section, the North African desert is explored from a Western perspective, in the selected writings of Paul Bowles. Bowles' quest for the Western identity is within the tradition of travel writings. In fact, romance is perhaps the genre that foregrounds the individual endeavour to define the self against the background of wholeness and society. It is useful, however, to define romance as the genre that helped shaping the Western speaker's "I." The aim of the following analysis is to pinpoint the Western vein in Bowles' treatment of the North African space and to underline his cultural background and maturational process of writing, to which the argument is leading to. The theme is North African but the language and style are Western in *The Sheltering Sky*, which is Bowles' first novel to mark his awareness of the space at issue. The comparison between Bowles and Conrad rests on the fact that both wrote on the quest in the heart of darkness or wilderness. It is important, also, to delineate the differences between the two different epochs to which these writers belong. In this respect, the questions are: why did they choose romance? What did this form offer to facilitate achieving their goals? What is romance? What is the place of *The Sheltering Sky* in the tradition of romance writing? Why do Bowles' characters escape, love and fall in the desert?

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Bowles structured his novels as travel narratives. A collage of different narrative pieces is presented to the reader. The story is told by the narrator, the story within the story is told by Merhnia, the protagonist becomes the

[72] Coupe, *Myths*, 160.

narrator for short instances, when Port dies, and Kit takes his place in the journey and in narrating.

Shifts in narrative perspective are the recurring motifs of travel and shelter seeking throughout Bowles' story. The North African desert is depicted from the different points of view including the native, French, English and American perspectives. Merhnia recounts the experience in the desert of a North African born woman who serves as another narrator within the narrative. The tales of the nomads' brutal behaviour frame the long, central narrative concerning the young women Kit and the trio of Marhnia's story. Clearly, the role of the storyteller, her relation to her story and to her audience and her manner lie at the heart of Bowles' technique and form an intersection with the author's investigation of past and present in the North African context.

The inclusion of Moghrebi oral narratives in the English novel is a novelty in itself. Bowles gives the natives the literary space to tell their stories emphasising the capacity of oral tales to impress a highly modernised audience. He shows an ability to invert the usual inside/outside contrast used to develop a narrative point of view. Bowles's ability to transform a foreign narrative for English-speaking audiences is to be given a full consideration. His later works in this area provide a unique perspective on Moghrebi narrative traditions rarely encountered in textual form.

On the other hand, the violence and brutality in the narrative reflect an extremely uncomfortable realism in the events depicted. Bowles' usual narrative approach produces psychological horror in the style of Poe. At the same level, he depicts the fascination of his characters vis-à-vis the desert and its psychological landscapes.

Another aspect of Bowles' travel narrative in *The Sheltering Sky* focuses on the dynamic of attraction and repulsion which, before him, had been a characteristic of Orientalist and colonialist narratives in general, often rooted in a psychological process that generally marks dehumanising appropriations of the Other. In Bowles, the relations between coloniser and colonised that were marked by demonization and misrepresentation, though he exposes it; offer a subversion of the type of narrative about the Other. In following the traditions of nineteenth-century narrative style, Bowles' narrative also focuses on the confrontation between East and West. In the continuation, the idea is to show Bowles' similarities to and differences from Conrad mainly; in Bowles' works a naive colonial sight sees his way into the heart of darkness.

The events are told by an anonymous narrator, of whom we learn from the first lines that he is involved in the protagonist's romance. The narrator starts his account about Port characterizing him as a nihilistic being:

> He awoke; opened his eyes. The room meant very little to him; he was too deeply *immersed* in the *nonbeing* from which he had just come. If he had not the *energy to ascertain his position in time and space,* he also lacked the desire. He was somewhere, he had come back through, vast regions from *nowhere*; there was the certitude of an *infinite sadness* at the core of his consciousness, but the sadness was reassuring, because it alone was familiar.[73]

The protagonist is reborn in sadness, his loss in time and space (nonbeing-nowhere) is backed by the depressive attitude of the modernist hero. Unlike Conrad's Jim in the nineteenth-century colonial project who is portrayed as "an inch, perhaps two under six feet",[74] Port is the twentieth-century

[73] Bowles, *SS*, 1, [Highlights mine].

[74] Conrad, *Lord Jim*, 3.

character whose portrait cannot lack the impact of two devastating World wars. Indeed, Port is a traveller, who takes his malaise and anxiety from one place to another. His relationships are marked by deception. For instance, he travels with his friend Tunner; then he does his best to avoid him. He struggles with his marriage; then surrenders to the first opportunity of sex with a prostitute. In this sense, Port is the Western character that shows no grandeur and has no cultural projects to civilise a wild space as a colonial period romance would put it.

Psychological violence in the twentieth-century metropolis has already smashed the protagonists' self-esteem and confidence in their own culture. Their journeys are reactions to uproot their sadness and loss. Anne Foltz compares Bowles to nineteenth-century writers, such as Edgar Allan Poe and Joseph Conrad, who brought the thematic concerns of the previous generation into the second half of the twentieth-century, "where life on the edge is here told in traditionally formal structures." She observes that Bowles' early familiarity with Poe is recurrent in the tone and mood he attempts to create in his stories. In fact, Bowles often seems to have more in common with "Henry James as a fellow expatriate than he does with his fellow contemporary writers William Gass or Robert Coover, neither of whom is known for his interest in following the traditions of nineteenth-century narrative style. Bowles fits in much more compatibly with E. M. Forster's idea of 'only connect' and D. H. Lawrence's interest in the primitive." Hence she believes and continues to find Bowles' place in an erected tradition as his narrative "conveys a lively fixation on foreign cultures much as does another dislocated writer, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, and both are able to convey their

own curious status as outsiders in the open-endedness of their short stories."[75]

Concerning the idea of leaving one's land in quest for new dimensions of life, Joseph Campbell, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, identified many common patterns running through hero myths and stories from around the world, which conformed to what he called "the monomyth."[76] He describes the hero's journey as occurring in a cycle consisting of three phases. First, in *departure,* the hero leaves his comfortable and familiar world and ventures into the darkness of the unknown. Second, in *initiation*, the hero faces a series of tests in which he must prove his character. Third, in *return*, the hero brings the boon of his quest back for the benefit of his people.

The hero's journey is about growth and passage. The journey requires a separation from the comfortable, known world, and an initiation into a new level of awareness, skill, and responsibility, and then a return home. Each stage of the journey must be passed successfully if the initiate is to become a hero. To turn back at any stage is to reject the need to grow and mature.

Port's romance, accordingly, submits to the rules of the genre, but its motive and finale are different. Frye's theory of romance in *The Anatomy of Criticism* is the main reference in our understanding of Port's/Bowles' romance. "The essential element of plot," Frye considers, "is an adventure" and "romance is naturally a sequential and processional form" which arrows towards a known aim, referred to as the object of the "quest" or "the element that gives literary form to the romance."[77]

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[75] Foltz, *Paul*, 81-120.

[76] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces,* (Princeton University Press: 1972), 50.

[77] Bowles, *SS*, 186.

By situating the narrative montage in its appropriate historical context, this part highlights the narrative technique. Richard M. Eastman calls "open parable," "the narrative that cannot be 'closed' and given a simplified interpretation. Because the author's rhetoric allows opaque details, 'irreducible' hints that will not lead to any single reading, the narrative remains open to several interpretations."[78] In Bowles, themes, "heroism," narrative point of view and all the elements that make up the novel as a literary depiction of the North African space resist to univocal interpretation. In his travel novel, Bowles depicts the desert following his travellers. In this context, Port sets himself to the exploration of the desert; so the question is whether his act comes out of an artistic need. Is it an escape from the new centre of the world, after 1945, or a look back to the Man's origins before technology and modernity? Alternatively, is his trip a rediscovery of one's humanity and a breathless search for Western identity?

Through the whole narrative, Port is distinguished from the other characters and made unique. Yet, in book III, while he is absent from the narration, it is Kit who carries on his mission. The complete Western engagement in the project of making romance a genre that fits the exigencies and the aims of the age has ended in the romance of the 1950's. Bowles' heroes are adventurers who seek a different world from theirs, but they go into a quest for the authentic qualities of the desired space before the conquest of modernisation and mechanisation devastates it. Indeed, the idea of the original space and people means for Bowles protecting North Africa from what he evaded in his metropolis' sophisticated life. As remarked earlier, the adventurer is the backbone of romance and so it is in Bowles' writing.

[78] Linda W. Wagner, "Paul Bowles and the Characterization of Women", in Studies in Modern Fiction, ed. Sheila Fitzgerald (Fall 1985) http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA17156449&v=2.1&u=wash89460&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w> (12/12/2013), 6.

As an adventurer, Port proves to be courageous, able to contain his fears and opening up his chest to confront violence; his fearless exploratory tours go beyond his other compatriots who speak of the "we" as worried by the Other and his threats. In chapter four, "[Port] walked through the streets, unthinkingly seeking the darker ones, glad to be alone and to feel the night air against his face."[79] He shows his interest in emptiness, silence and darkness right from the beginning of the novel. He is fearless of "huge insects", continual fights, and filth under his feet, skulls of dogs and remains of fish peopling the space; for him the whole frame is "like the highest part of a repeated melody whose other notes were inaudible."[80] He repeatedly describes the streets in a terrifying way, as in the following passage:

> He started down the bank to the right, sliding among the fish skeletons and dust […]. The stench was overpowering. He lit a match, saw the ground thick with chicken feathers and decayed melon rinds. [81]

The romance covers different desert cities and the New Yorker protagonist ventures throughout them, so different and alone. He has never stopped in front of loneliness; he seems to be looking for it and cherishing it. The scene, when he rented a bicycle and rode along with Kit and they seem to fuse for the first time in their auto-isolation and self-exile from civilization and its distorted copy in North Africa, argues for the protagonist's preferences for wilderness. The examples of Port's autonomy and courage are pervasive in the text. The narrator continues to highlight Port's courage in facing alone the desert and the unknown. Accordingly, this was the source of Port's heroism. While a heroic figure like Conrad's Jim is "a figure set upon a pedestal to represent […] the virtues of races that never grow old that have emerged

[79] Bowles, SS, 6.

[80] Bowles, SS, 7.

[81] Bowles, SS, 7.

from gloom."[82] Bowles' Port is like an actual port where land and sea meet, mingle and fuse. His denied desire to see, meet and possess the Other leads him to a sexual adventure as he yields to the first invitation from an unknown Arab. The deviant and the perverse are the themes of Port's adventure. Marhnia is but one moment in his journey. Yet the book is called according to the story-within-the-story "the Tea in the Sahara". This scene is further analysed in future pages.

Port follows his path in the North African desert towards the steady degeneration of his persona, as he moves away from civilization and its morality, in order to be swallowed up by primitive violence and decay. From nothingness inside to nothingness outside, the mood of emptiness veils and overshadows the space in the same way as the hollow men of T.S. Eliot and his contemporaries did. Bowles pits the virility and vigour in the foreground of the native life against the background of Western civilization.

Port's quest for authenticity is the aim of his delving into the native Sahara that is analogous to the cup of tea for the dead three women in Marhnia's account. The story of these women is intricate and central to Bowles' novel. Like the protagonist, they set themselves in a quest for the authentic scenery. They spent their lives dreaming and working hard to realise their vision of having tea in the Sahara. Once there, they had their last tea and died, a Biblical allusion that makes this last scene as eternal as the last Supper. Critics, like Caroline Bokinsky, see in Bowles the American fictional counterpart of Joseph Conrad. Indeed, Bowles writes of men stripped of the accoutrement of civilization, alone among the elements of nature, and fighting for survival, usually unsuccessfully. Bokinsky believes *The Sheltering Sky* is reminiscent of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad's African jungle becomes the African

[82] Frye, *Anatomy,* 162.

desert with Bowles. Bowles is fascinated with his surroundings and his own soul. Life in Morocco and his travels in the desert made him see nature as indifferent, uncaring and unaware of man.[83]

So far, romance with Bowles has been a phenomenon of *becoming* rather than *being*. He stated once that in his writing he wanted "to evoke a certain atmosphere" rather than create clear, sharp, outlined images. The space he ceded to fantasy is meant to elicit a mood or emotion. Port would go through many adventures in the North African desert. Although, he demonstrates a mighty courage, and he would be offered many opportunities to display either his heroism or his imperialistic greed, Port proves to be a deconstructed character of legend. When Bowles thought of introducing the major element of romance, "the love story,"[84] Port, as a postmodern persona, resists love on many occasions; even ignoring his wife's needs and trying to avoid intimacy. Immediately after Tunner's and Kit's adventure, Port comes to the awareness of the process of constructing his romance. What is interesting about the narrative is that it appears, clearly, to be making a discourse out of a real story.

For Frye, "the reward of the quest is or includes a bride."[85] The bride is Kit whose marriage is on the edge of failure and has become a relationship of emotionless sharing. The romance gains ground in the desert where isolation gave a rebirth and a revival to Port's and Kit's love story. Port feels at a certain point that the whole journey was constructed for the sake of the re-conquest of Kit. This is how he ends his quest for the Other in the desert, by dying full

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83 Caroline Bokinsky, "Paul (Frederick) Bowles", In *American Poets Since World War II*, ed. Donald J. Greiner, (Vol. 98. Detroit: Gale, 2007), <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA17156449&v=2.1&u=wash89460&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w> (11 May 2012), 5.

84 Frye, *Anatomy*, 181.

85 Frye, *Anatomy*, 193.

of Kit's fondness and devotion. It is, at this level, that the narrator appears to be challenging the logic of romance. "The Love Story" motif at this level of the narrative suggests that the so-called "hero" has reached the object and the end of his quest and now deserves "love" as a "reward," for his long loss. With the act of love, the hero passes away and someone else would carry on with the events. The romance as a construct based on the quest is betrayed by the "hero". Like Lord Jim for Conrad whose end came with Jewel.

The bride, according to Frye, "is often found in a perilous, forbidden or tabooed place, and she is, of course, often rescued from the unwelcome embraces of another and generally older male."[86] Indeed, that was the case for Kit. Kit was for long the love of Tunner, who tried to seduce her with his courteous manners. Tunner is depicted as the typical American male who stands for manners and delicate behaviour vis-à-vis women, unlike Port/Bowles, for whom gender limits, like space and time, do not exist. At this level, Port starts to escape from Tunner, taking his bride from one desert village to another at a racing pace, just as he did with Western civilization.

Port evades Tunner and the Western civilization he bears inside and all that stands for it in the desert. He contracts two kinds of fever. Love fever pushes him to protect Kit, after rediscovering their old complicity. The second is typhoid that takes his life. The rediscovery of love in Port's romance has a twofold importance, first because without Kit the romance would not be complete, and secondly because she, ironically, contributes to the abortion of the protagonist's romance by changing his original quest from authenticity to love. The point, here, is that Port's heroism in the desert is to be shared with, if not embodied by, Kit.

86 Frye, *Anatomy*, 193.

In addition, in a romance, Frye argues, a character plays the role of "the refuter of festivity […]. Such a character would call attention to realistic aspects of life like fear in the presence of danger, which threaten the unity of the romantic mood."[87] In Port's romance, both the "bride" and the "refuter of festivity" are Kit. The narrator presents her as frail, delicate, fearful and a reminder of the reality, which Port kept on rejecting. She was a puzzle for the narrator. The reason behind his puzzle is the fact that, by her logic and fears, she limited the advance of the quest and the flow of the narration. Surprisingly, in book III, Kit loses the Western *logos* and fear of the Other. She embodies both the desert, in its savagery and infinite heat, and the Other by putting on his costumes. She acts as Port wanted to do in his life, with devotion to the original project of his romance. As a postmodern character, Kit's metamorphosis surprises the reader and distorts the narration. Kit and Tunner are characters that, in Frye's words,

> Tend to be either for or against the quest. If they assist it they are idealized as simply gallant or pure, if they obstruct it they are caricatured as simply villainous or cowardly. Hence, every typical character in romance tends to leave his moral opposite confronting him, like black and white pieces in a chess game.[88]

The distinction between the characters is highlighted in the narrative of *The Sheltering Sky*. In addition, those who are for or against Port, the romantic 'hero', cannot be easily identified. His assistants in his journey can be also seen as his opponents. The three American travellers into the North African desert departed as friends and ended up separate, as Tunner becomes the antagonist in Port's love story and a threat to his marriage. At a second level, the seemingly steady procession of the romance towards a successful

87 Frye, *Anatomy*, 197.

88 Frye, *Anatomy*, 195.

conclusion is all of the sudden thwarted by the illness of Port. Unlike Port, Tunner is, as his name, derived from 'tun',[89] may suggest, an extremely large container. His covered refined manners mask eagerness to greedy destruction for personal and egocentric aims. He would destroy the marriage of Kit and Port for the sake of his own benefit.

The three fundamental stages in a romance, Frye argues, are respectively, "The *agon*, or conflict, the *pathos* or death struggle, and the *anagon* or discovery, the recognition of the hero who has clearly proved himself to be a hero even if he does not survive the struggle."[90] The conflict or the struggle is another "chance missed" and Port dies without realizing his dream. His death leaves the reader perplexed. There is book III to read yet after the "hero" dies. Sawyer-Lucanno adds,

> While the *majoun* no doubt freed Bowles' mind enough to imagine Port's death, the details themselves were largely derived from his memory of the typhoid delirium he had experienced years earlier in the American hospital in Paris.[91]

The question that remains hanging is "Is Port a hero?". The answer to this question will allow the reader to decide about the success of Port's romance. The hesitation about the answer to this question is due to the unclearness of heroism in *The Sheltering Sky*. Kit's final adventure leaves no space to assimilate its different steps and any sense of a foolish surrendering to the unknown. However, Port's death is heroic; even if the cause of his death is illness and nothing is heroic about it, the quest for authenticity and purity in the desert that caused his illness and his eventual doom is doubtlessly the

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[89] "A large cask or barrel, usually for liquids, esp. wine, ale, or beer, or for various provisions." (OED n.1)

[90] Frye, *Anatomy*, 187.

[91] Sawyer-Lucanno, *Invisible*, 265.

source of his heroism. The tantalization of the desert becomes stronger towards the end as Kit takes the torch to carry on Port's journey. To Bowles, narrative is also meant to extend on his life "if." He had typhoid too and so he uses this detail in his novel, among many other biographical references, as he said in one of his interviews "had I decide to go back to USA after my sickness or died, things would had proceeded differently"[92]. This is the same thing he hypotheses in his later works and that should be dealt with in length.

Accordingly, Kit succeeds in achieving 'heroism' when she fuses with what she had abhorred initially. Bowles' death is the element that completes his own romance. Though critics have judged the journey of our protagonists as one of complete failure, the death of Port and the madness of Kit, and that failure seems to be the destiny of the western wo/man in the North African desert as it was for the predecessors of Conrad's and Bowles' protagonists. Our endeavour is to show how the opposite belief is another possible reading of the romance. *The Sheltering Sky* is a multi-heroic novel.

Moreover, Port's death is caused ironically by the contact with a French Lieutenant rather than the contact with natives. In fact, Bowles is the man behind the text, who starts to speak of the natives in *The Sheltering Sky*, an act he preferred to challenge when he chose to give them voice and translate them as he matured artistically. Sawyer argues: "Still, Bowles has continued to translate Mrabet and to write about the country he adopted nearly half a century ago."[93] Bowles started his writing career by paying tribute to his Western predecessors and friends who chose the Orient as their main topic. It is a tradition to portray the Arabian and the North African desert in exotic terms so as to satisfy the exigencies of an audience that wants the Other to

[92] Sawyer-Lucanno, *Invisible*, 265.

[93] Sawyer-Lucanno, *Invisible*, 417.

remain as such as a way to self-glory. In fact, Bowles' early works had the greatest success and appreciation, more than in later decades when he started to treat his native and Western protagonists on equal grounds.

In *The Sheltering Sky*, the protagonist does not die as the spirit of the journey passes to Kit who ends up by merging with the very essence of the desert as an authentically natural and rough space. "We are the only makers of meaning," Laurence Coupe writes, "truths and justice have no being apart from the language in which we speak of them and the practical uses to which we put it."[94] This idea was as true for Renaissance intellectuals who, while they were fashioning the western "I," were aware that it was only fiction. But it appears that this romantic image created by the Western man was too attractive to be dropped and the nineteenth-century western man clung to romance more than at any other time because romance appeared as Europe needed to mark the discrepancy between the "I" and the "Other". Conrad, the questioner of old beliefs, declares his distrust in language: "words, as is well known, are the foes of reality; the old, old words, worn, thin, defaced."[95]

The Sheltering Sky is a question Bowles posed to Western wo/man at a historically critical time, when God's death was declared, the author's death idem and the deep resentment for wars and politics had been generated as never before. Like Conrad in the heart of the African jungle, Bowles' allusion to ancient myths in the North African desert was a literary trial to address the contemporaneous bewilderment of the post-war period.

The idea of romance in the imperialist era, Terry Eagleton wrote, "Demanded the production of a corporate, messianic, idealist ideology."[96] Imperialism is

[94] Coupe, *Myth*, 148.

[95] Cedric, *Preface*, 185.

[96] Terry Eagleton & Federic Jameson, *Nationalism, colonialism, and Literature* (Minnesota: MUP, 1992), 134.

one of the producers of the romantic ideology. An ideology that made its followers believe in their inferior capacities and their being authors of their destiny. Eagleton describes the hero of such a period "as a romantic colonialist, strenuously shaping his own destiny."[97] British colonialism, during Conrad's era, Bowles replaces by the often considered devastating cultural colonisation in the term "Americanization". Sawyer-Lauçanno says

> About a third of the way through the novel, the narrative shifts to focus on Stenham and Lee, who have just met each other. Stenham is an "old hand", speaks Moghrebi, is in love with Morocco that was, and consequently, laments the encroaching Europeanization of the country: "when I first came here it was *a pure* country. There was music and dancing and magic every day in the streets. Now it's finished everything […][98].

> "[Bowles] takes a knife to the corpus of civilization in the United States to lay open its disease." [99]

By the time *The Sheltering Sky* was written, the United States had already reached the peak of its progress and had become the first power that the rest of the world imitated. After the western man's practices in the colonies proved to be wrecking to the historical and cultural harmony of other-land's peoples, the meeting with the Other ended in bloody exits, which are recalled by the violent scenes in Bowles' texts. The World Wars along with the decline of faith dropped the Western "I" in a deep inquiry on loss and pessimism. All the turbulence was absorbed by the intellectuals of the period. Nevertheless, when it comes to Bowles, his absorption of the events of his time was uttered artistically in a very personal approach to life and literature. In this prospect, Campbell contends, "Living in Tangier full-time, Bowles developed a greater

[97] Eagleton, *Nationalism,* 138.

[98] Sawyer-Lauçanno, *Invisible*, 324, [italics mine].

[99] Pounds, Divided, 42.

awareness of its cultural differences and in particular its secret world of magic, which, like Surrealism, proposed an alternative mode of being that, challenged the very basis of Euro-American thinking in science and reason."[100] This goes hand in hand with Bowles' recognition: "a widespread system of practical magic is an important phenomena; it keeps the minds of its participants in a healthy state of personalised anarchy."[101] This "anarchic potential" is central in Bowles' literature as a challenging force to what seems to be superficially "smooth-running, logical world of technique and systemized patterns of thought." [102]

If Conrad sets his protagonists to convey what Cedric Watt believes to be "[the] sense of the absurdity of moral beings in a non-moral universe, [the] profound scepticism about the value of modern industrial society and its acquisitive imperialisms, and [the] view of humans as myopic participants in destructive processes."[103] Bowles employs such myopic participants as the English Lady Lyles and her son and the French lieutenant as the hollow men of modernist satire. The depiction of the main English and French characters has a different resonance to the natives. While the narrator focuses on the Western cultural inadequacy of the natives as they are unfit for western cultural labels of mannerism, like eating and speaking; the English and French were ridiculed in their presupposition that the natives should act and prepare tea like them.

Port and Kit are heroes who paid with their lives for the sake of their belief in the Other's land, as a purely immaterial place. They declared their invalidity to adhere to the Western project of enrichment as well as

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[100] Campbell, Dialogic, 178.

[101] Paul Bowles, *In Touch: The Letters of Paul Bowles* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), 5.

[102] Campbell, Dialogic, 178.

[103] Cedric, *Preface*, 184.

Campbell's hero pattern as the winner who grows with his journey and brings riches to his people. They are defenders of their romantic project that was set from the start to give an aesthetic dimension to what they perceived the dehumanised West. By establishing a contact with the *origin* and the human in a completely non-manufactured land, Port shows good intentions, not that original heroism, knighthood of the past times but of the beyond colonial Westerner. He is an impossibly refashioned identity seeker. His journey in the desert takes him to physical degeneration and death. He survives morally when his project is carried on with his best companion: Kit. Yet the aim of the Moresby's journey is unheroic, in the sense there is no one genuine act that reckons the protagonists among the heroes. As Francine Prose declares

> It would be hard to think of another writer so unmoved and uninterested in the traditional values and virtues that we associate with Western humanism (compassion, generosity, empathy), just as it's difficult to find one genuinely heroic character or act of heroism, selflessness, or sacrifice in Bowles's oeuvre.[104]

Port knew about the fatal rule of the game from the very beginning, and it seems that his frustration with himself made him accept it without resistance. The unsuccessful part of Port is his resistance to the Western beliefs whilst his embodiments of the Western identify face to face with the North African desert during the French colonial dominance. He is the Westerner but not the coloniser, he is in company but he escapes from his purely American friend as if he evades the land embodied by Tunner. For him there is absolutely no return. If myth hovers over romance, Ulysses is the hero

[104] Francine Prose, "The Spider's House, (Reviews: the coldest eye)", Harper's Magazine (March, 2002: 60), in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (Vol. 209, Detroit: Gale, 2009), <http://go.gàlegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA17156449&v=2.1&u=wàsh89460&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w> (11/5/2012, 13:28), 60.

against whom heroes measured their heroism; he is the one who went home once he had accomplished all the rites of the journey successfully, and that was not Port's case whose return is denied, as any quester for authenticity.

Critics explain the *raison d'être* of the Moresbys' quest on principles of authenticity and un-authenticity that Heidegger describes in *Being and Time* (1927). Tobias Wolff sees that Bowles' life and work on the quest in the desert are a direct response to the concepts of authenticity[105]. In dealing with *The Sheltering Sky*, he defines travelling with what Bowles describes as "individual,"

> this appetite for the "mindless contentment " of self-surrender is nothing new in makeup, but we modern folk have devised for ourselves a singularly rich offering of oppressions to satisfy it ... Our failing resistance to these attacks on our sense of worth as individuals is the central drama of our time. *The Sheltering Sky* records the struggle with complete fidelity, impassively noting every step in the process of surrender.[106]

For Bowles, "when you go on a trip, you shouldn't know for how long that's travelling."[107] Port in *The Sheltering Sky* surrenders himself to time and space. He starts the journey from a real map to the people's mental map. His surrender reaches the apogee with death and when his Kit quits the insidious world of law and order for the North African Sahara. Their "cultural deracination", because of a "deep alienation of self", is the main experience that sets the Moresby in the desert. Port cannot feel at home unless on a desert mountain in an open space with no sense of belonging, just void encircling him. "He would have found it difficult to tell, among the many

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105 Tobias Wolf, *Paul Bowles and the authentic Man* <http://thestickingplace.com/wp-content/_pdfs/paulbowles.pdf > (06/10/2014), 5.

106 Wolf, *Paul*, 221.

107 Wolf, *Paul*, 41.

places he had lived, precisely where it was he had felt most at home."[108] The journey confirms Port's belief in originality and so does the story reported by Marhnia who shares the dream of authenticity with Port as she makes myth her priority while having tea in the Sahara, which – though a trivial act for society – becomes central in their lives. Here Bowles exposes his own creed in individuality. In P. Bond's *The Authentic Man*, the writer establishes a link between Bowles' narrative of the quest and Heidegger:

> Heidegger insists that more than any other existential state, dread focuses attention on one's own state of Being and is thus the tool most suited to reveal the primary existential feeling of Dasein. The primordial meaning of dread is to feel "not-at-home", while the persuasion of inauthenticity is to make one feel comfortable in the unexamined and uncritical life of the "they". By losing the feeling of "being-at-home" one is forced to rely on one's Being and not that of the "they". [109]

For Bowles, as for Port, the United States was "an apocalypse."[110] He "feels as though the United States were only a temporary exile"[111]. On the same issue, in his pages from Cold Point, Bowles sustains Port's beliefs declaring,

> Our civilization is doomed to a short life: its component parts are too heterogeneous. I personally am content to see everything in the process decay. The bigger the Bombs, the quicker it will be done. Life is visually too hideous for one to make the attempt to preserve it. Let it go. [112]

Port sets out on an existentialist trip through the world debunking all the laws Western man yearns to establish in a savage and uncivilized Other. Bowles' journey is an unending search for the authentic being within himself.

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108 Bowles, *SS*, 6.

109 Wolf, *Paul*, 8.

110 Wolf, *Paul*, 41.

111 Bowles, *Touch*, 4.

112 Bowles, *Touch*, 83.

Port, on his journey, "would feel voluptuously weary, in a vaguely floating condition"[113]. The circumspect *flaneur*, deracinated and free-floating, with his absences (absence of home, belonging...) subverts his presence. This circumspection coincides with Heidegger's "never-dwelling anywhere."[114]

However, when Bowles settled in Morocco, he cherished the "magical place which in disclosing its secrets would give... wisdom and ecstasy- perhaps even death."[115] This is how Port arrived in North Africa feeling the dread of Western civilization and cherishing purgation in the desert, the healer from America's corruption as was certainly so for the Hebrew leaving Egypt wandering for the "city upon a hill." In addition, the same idea recalls Heidegger's notion of "circumspection" or the complete voiding in a landscape new to the memory, which effaces itself immediately for the very essence of survival: breathing and heart beating. This idea is essential for being in its trip towards becoming. "For no one who has stayed in the Sahara for a while is quite the same as when he came."[116] For him as for Port, the desert is where "you immediately feel you've left the stream."[117] Port, after the intense encounter with the Other (for instance his encounter with Marhnia), falls deeply in the abyss of self-perdition, a moral death that negates his *being* in pure *becoming.* He starts with denying Tunner the friend who stands for the entire American culture. He keeps working on Kit making of her his eternal partner,

> And although he was aware that the very silences and emptiness that touched his soul terrified her he could not bear to be reminded of that. It

113 Bowles*, Touch*, 85.

114 Heidegger, Building, 216-7.

115 Bowles, *Touch*, 125.

116 Wolf, *Paul*, 14.

117 Caponi, *Paul*, 1994, 86.

> was as if always he held the fresh hope that she, too, would be touched in the same way as he by solitude and the proximity to infinite things.[118]

> The wind at the window celebrated her dark sensation of having attained a new depth of solitude.[119]

Solitude is a condition of purgation and cleansing that Heidegger describes in the process of *Dasein*; it is to float free. Bowles cites Kafka at the start of book three, entitled "the Sky,"

> From a certain point onward there is no longer any turning back that is the point that must be reached.[120]

This is simply Port's way of refusing putting his roots down, procreating and adhering to marital dictates. This is simply the *flaneur's* being forever "homeless". An acceptance of absolute nothingness is what Port lives in his quest for solitude, as opposed to loneliness. Unlike Conrad's white heroes, Bowles' have no colour; in the sense the "I" is in opposition to Others, rather than the Other. Bowles' approach to the image of the Other or the Arab comes from an American tradition. In the following part, my idea is to mention other literary figures from Western literature as a way to better understand Bowles' characters. Some of the references are to writers, other allusions to their fictional characters.

In *The Sheltering Sky*, the voyage is rather an artistic quest for self-exploration and the discovery of the Other. It is in this way that this study focuses on the quest as a three-pronged process that equally spans a spatial progress towards self-discovery per se, a self-dimensioning vis-à-vis the Other and an aesthetic fusion. Bowles is a romancer of aesthetic vein and

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118 Bowles, SS, 37.

119 Bowles, *SS*, 74.

120 Bowles, *SS*, 113.

expatriate's openness to the other, the different that becomes universal and personal at the same time. *The Sheltering Sky* is a narrative set to decolonise the "I" from the cultural bounds rather than decolonising the Other, politically and ideologically. It addresses a universal "I". Its peculiarity dwells in translating the Other's difference in terms of aesthetic originality and historical authenticity rather than technological and modernized wealth. The essence of Port's and Kit's story - their journey into the North African desert - goes through three pivotal stages. In the first, Port is the protagonist of a romance with infinite antagonisms insidious to himself while he explores the "land of terror", thinking less as a lost Westerner as he advances in his trip. Anne Foltz declares that In *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Leslie Fiedler assigns Bowles the epithet "a pornographer of terror," which remains a widely accepted, yet rarely investigated encapsulation of Bowles's writing.[121]

The quest for the Other

> After all everybody, that is, everybody who writes is interested in living inside themselves in order to tell what is inside themselves. That is why writers have to have two countries, the one where they belong and the one in which they live really.
>
> Gertrude Stein

In this part, I study the protagonist's ambivalent attitudes towards the North African desert and its people from the Westerner's depicting eye/depicted "I" and the "Other". Port's travel in the Maghreb starts with a desire to explore

[121] Foltz, *Paul*, 85.

an empty space, the desert. His awareness of the landscape came from his interior life and desires. In fact, the vast and the empty, space where he and Kit enjoy openness and infinity, is peopled by the native inhabitants. This recurrent visionary contemplation accounts for his attempt at depicting the desert as ahistorical. Through his visions, Port, as Bowles himself, tries to find an alternative to what he hates in the West. This is what Bowles urges the people from cities like Fes and Tangier to do, to go back to the tradition preserved by the desert, to rid the whole space of historical contamination brought about by Europe, as if European history hinders the existence of North Africa out of the European definition, and European cultural, national and religious decisions are transcribed on the North African land. Bowles' protagonists, mainly Port and Stenham, seem to be the ones who believe in a glorious past and a particularity of the desert that keeps reminding the cities on the Mediterranean Sea.

The Arab in Bowles' culture

One of his immediate American predecessors who dealt with the image of the Arab in his novels is Mark Twain, who, through a child game of piracy, presents a number of stereotypes that cling to the image of the Arab in American imagination. The Arab as a camel-riding nomad, a rich tradesman and the possessor of magic are the Orientalist's way to depict the Oriental man. Enchantment and charm, like the African voodoo, are meant to justify the disappearance of the mysterious and enigmatic Arab. In Bowles' life

Cherifa, the intimate friend of Jane, is said to be using magic to subdue Jane for the sake of material game.[122]

Orientalist writings made the conformity between reality and fiction, between the Orient as a reality and the *Arabian Nights,* as a well-established archive, a basic approach to render the Orient in an "exotic" interpretation. The example of Twain is an antecedent look at the Orientalist fantasy on Oriental myths that "leads [...] to disillusionment" by restoring "distortions and misrepresentations;" declaring the futility of the "Orient–occident dichotomy in this sense;"[123] and giving all the responsibility to literature in perpetuating this division. Yet it is a play within the story or mere staging.

The English literature on the Arabian Desert is important because it forms a cultural frame to the work of Paul Bowles. Even if we have no evidence on Bowles' knowledge of these texts, many English writers and poets[124] talked about the desert. Particularly Thomas Edward Lawrence, known as "Lawrence of Arabia", is one of the most outstanding figures of the past century. The enduring fame of Lawrence's legend arises from his enigmatic and romantic character, mainly in his intimate relationship with the Middle Eastern desert. T. E Lawrence's *Seven Pillars* is one of the well-established adherent texts in the travelogue genre.

Lawrence's exploration of the Arabian Desert amalgamated with the Orientalist vision of the Sahara. His adventure in the desert involved him into a conflict of interests. Although, he expressed his good intentions, Lawrence's

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[122] Gena Dagel Caponi, *Paul Bowles*, (New York: Twayne, 1998), 164.

[123] Ghaylen Najjar, *Mark Twain: a Postmodern Reading* (Tunis university of Manouba, 2004), 62.

[124] To cite few names, for instance we have the nineteenth century romantic poets, like Wordsworth (in Book V of *The Prelude*) and Shelley (his sonnet 'Ozymandias'), and moving on to writers in the mid-century and afterwards: Kinglake's Eothen and Rider Haggard (various works and various localities) come immediately to mind, but more interesting may be Amelia Edwards' *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, for it introduces a female traveller into this brief presentation. Other important authors like David George Hogarth (1862 – 1927), a British archaeologist and scholar associated with T. E. Lawrence. In 1915, during World War I, Hogarth joined the "Geographical Section of the Naval Intelligence Division".

maps are considered the first British milestone in mapping the Middle East.[125] T. E. Lawrence's *Pillars* is a compendium of Orientalist themes which reflect Lawrence's image of the Arabian Desert at the beginning of the twentieth century. He aimed at providing the reader with a historical and cultural background to the Arab revolt from a fictional construction of the Arab history, geography and mentality. Compared to the Arab's depiction as a pre-historical Desert-man that the character of Lawrence perhaps gained a heroic dimension.

In the *Seven Pillars*, the West represents progress, action, dynamism and creativity, whereas the East is cast as the stagnant "Other" and associated with images of silence, death, sterility, waste and decadence. The first town Lawrence came into contract with as he embarked on his first visit to Arabia was Jidda. Lawrence's depiction of a desert city puts forward these prejudices

> It was like a dead city, so clean underfoot, and so quiet. Its winding, even streets were floored with damp sand solidified by time and as silent to the tread as any carpet. The lattices and wall-returns deadened all reverberations of voice. There were no carts, no shod animals, no bustle anywhere. Everything was hushed, strained, even furtive... there were no loud dogs, no crying children... and the rare people we did meet, all thin, and as it were wasted with disease, with scarred, hairless faces and screwed-up eyes, slipped past us quickly and cautiously, not looking at us... the atmosphere was oppressive, deadly[126].

Lawrence presents this powerful image of Jidda as prototype not only for any desert city but for the whole region. Death is prevailing, and killing seems to be the unique communicative tool used by its people. He focuses on the

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[125] For further information see: T.E. Lawrence, <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/T. E. Lawrence>, (11/12/2014, 16:12), and Jeremy Wilson, *Lawrence of Arabia, a Pocket Biography* (Stroud, Sutton Publishing, 1997), <http://www.telstudies.org/biography/biog_lawrence.shtml>, (11/12/2014, 16:12), "The map of the Middle East that belonged to Lawrence has been put on exhibit at the Imperial War Museum in London. In fact, Lawrence drew the map and presented it to Britain's War Cabinet in November 1918, as part of his lobbying on behalf of the Sharif and his sons. The map provides an alternative to present-day borders in the region, based on the sensibilities of the local populations. It includes a separate state for the Armenians and groups the people of present-day Syria, Jordan, and parts of Saudi Arabia in another state, based on tribal patterns and commercial routes. Some of the subsequent wars and conflicts in the region might have been avoided had Lawrence's proposals been met with support."

[126] Thomas Edward Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom, an account of Lawrence's part in the Arab Revolt,* (London: J. and N. Wilson, 2004), 72.

decadence of the space not only of the Arab mode of living, people and locality, but also as a symbol of the orient as a whole. Despite the fact that Lawrence's Orient carries his individual and distinctive signature, this Orient, like any other colonial construction, represents a passive, alien form of existence, which, at best, belongs to the past. This description of the Oriental material objects is compatible with Lawrence's analysis of the Bedouin of the desert, the Arabs and the Semites as a whole, for they were also depicted as objects to be judged against a Western criterion,

> The Bedouin of the desert, born and grown up in it, had embraced with all his soul this nakedness too harsh for volunteers... he lost material ties, comforts, all superfluities and other complications to achieve a personal liberty which haunted starvation and death...[127]

Nevertheless, there are other reasons for Lawrence presenting the Bedouin in this aesthetic manner in association with the desert, and the implications go far beyond seeing the Bedouin, his gestures and rituals as mere embodiment of decadent life. Lawrence used climatological and geographical terms in his delineation of the character of the Bedouin and his life as a natural explanation.

Lawrence has been criticised for his hostility to the colonial machine and his support to the Arabs, whether wisely or not, the meaning of these commitments to his beliefs and "friends" deepened his frustration that ended by his recognition of his limited capacity to fulfil his promises.

His love for the Arabs did not hinder his colonial cultural background from showing his refusal for those peoples as they are. Instead he urged them to advance and become Arabs in European attires and in a Western way of thinking. More precisely, he tried to call Bedouins to metamorphose from Oriental to Occidental. Inviting Semites simply not to become themselves,

[127] Lawrence, *Seven,* 38.

Lawrence describes them by their belonging to the desert. To highlight the desert's influence, he declares,

> Semites had no half-tones in their register of vision. They were a people of... black and white, who saw the world always in contour. They were a dogmatic people, despising doubt, our modern crown of thorns. They did not understand our metaphysical difficulties, our introspective questionings... Their convictions were by instinct, their activities intuitional...[128]

In this passage, and in the allusion to his "metaphysical difficulties" Lawrence emphasizes his belonging to Western philosophical tradition for the word metaphysics recalls Kant's and further in time Aristotle's texts. At this level, Lawrence speaks on behalf of the speculative Western Man in his perpetual search for truth. In contrast, he portrays Semites as simple, primitive people depending on their intuition and instinct in their perception of reality. He used the word Semites to mean Bedouin and Arabs. Despite his continual love/hatred discourse, Lawrence praises the Bedouins.

He acted as the saviour but he believed in the inferiority of the people he was dealing with

> For more than a century, explorers into the deserts of Arabia, and into the heart of Bedu culture, have romanticized and admired the unique nomadic culture of the Bedu. And writers like Charles Montagu Doughty, Anne Noel King Blunt, T.E. Lawrence, and Freya Stark have helped establish what may be termed an "Arabist" tradition (Melman, 2002). There is little doubt that the most notable and respected contributor to this "Arabist" tradition was a man dubbed "The Last Explorer" - Wilfred Thesiger. This upper-class British writer, [...] developed an especially close friendship with the Bedu during a series of journeys across the Empty Quarter and Oman in the 1940s[129].

Wilfred Thesiger shared with Lawrence the devotion to a cause concerning the Bedouins of the Arabian Desert. While the cause of Lawrence was giving the Bedouins the right to decide on their own space consideration; Thesiger's was rather and ardent defence of Bedouins' traditional identity and its loss

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[128] Lawrence, *Seven,* 36-7.

[129] Lewis Dennis, "Thesiger and the Authentic Periphery", *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, (Vol. 16, No. 1), Post Traditional Environments in a Post Global World: Ninth International Conference, (Sharjah/Dubai: International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments (IASTE), FALL 2004), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41758249>, (08/11/2013 09:32), 54.

of cultural and topographical authenticity. His critics, Dennis Lewis is one of them, consider *Arabian Sands'* merit as an interesting ethical response to the "twin juggernauts of post modernity and globalization," and Thesiger's sufferance for his contribution in the imperialistic project in "the passing of old social and racial hierarchies" in the entire region.[130]

Thesiger is the Middle Eastern alternative to Bowles. They were simultaneously trading the desert soil in different yet so similar territories of the vast Arab world. He is the completing traveller to Bowles mission in North Africa by his exploration of the Empty Quarter at the same historical moment of colonialism and war of independence. Syrine C. Hout, a critic of Thesiger and Bowles declares

> In the spring of 1933, Paul Bowles trekked through the Algerian Sahara and several oases- Ghardaia, Touggourt, and El Oued- and across the northern edge of the Great East Erg, all the way to Kairouan in Tunisia. Between August and December of that same year, Wilfred Thesiger traveled through the Arussi Mountains to explore the Awash River in the Danakil country of Abyssinia. If both men had journeyed a little further in their respective directions, they would have perhaps not only met but also discovered just how much they had in common. The similarities are staggering, ranging from biographical details and personal characteristics to Weltanschauung. Born in 1910, both grew to be tall, slender, blond, elegant, and reserved. As men with homosexual orientations who came of age during a period characterized by a lack of tolerance, both tended to downplay the importance of sex. Both were professed atheists, and they also have in common that they traveled continuously and resided in different parts of the world. Critics have used similar adjectives to describe their writing styles: "laconic, deadpan" (Maier, "Morocco" 248), "spare" (Pinker 185), "detached" (Caponi, Paul Bowles 105), and "direct and bone-dry" (Sheppard 83). But the most compelling feature shared by Bowles and Thesiger is their relentless critique of Western civilization and technology. Their condemnatory statements, holding modern applied sciences responsible for the contamination of the Earth, are practically interchangeable.[131]

[130] Dennis, Thesiger, 54.

[131] Syrine Hout, "Grains of Utopia: The Desert as Literary Oasis in Paul Bowles's The Sheltering Sky and Wilfred Thesiger's Arabian Sands", Utopian Studies, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2000, (Penn State University PressStable), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20718178> (08/11/2013 07:31), 1.

Thesiger reserved the word "abomination" for cars and aeroplanes, and all his life resented the intrusion of any innovation post-dating the steam engine. His mystical regard for tradition was the reason behind his venturing in the harsh desert of Arabia. During his journeys he was caught up in inter-tribal raids, pursued by hostile raiders, and arrested by the Saudi authorities. He travelled alone in the Hejaz, the Assir and Najran, and explored the Trucial Coast and Dhofar in southern Arabia. He lived with the canoe-borne marshmen of Iraq for several periods over the seven years up to the Iraqi revolution of 1958. And still he abhores cities and gave his heart to the desert. His famous quote is one proof of his love for the sublematic wild utopia,

> I have travelled through some of the most magnificent scenery in the world and lived among interesting and little-known tribes, yet no country has moved me as did the desert of Arabia. No man can live there and emerge unchanged. He will carry, however faint, the imprint of the desert, the brand which marks the nomad; and he will have within him, weak or insistent according to his nature, the yearning to return. For that cruel land can cast a spell no temperate clime can match[132].

Like Bowles, Thesiger nicknamed “stone age man”[133] felt least at home in his own culture and with his own kind. He resented the “juggernaut of western "civilisation"” and the attempts at globalising the desert.[134] After the Wars, Bowles and Thesiger “[were] prompted to seek refuge in one place that had remained relatively protected from the winds of change in the late 1940’s: the desert.”[135] Thesiger’s love for the desert and the Bedouins who taught him companionship and love to human race, made many critics enlist him among Oriental people rather than Orientalists. In his preface to the Arabian Sands,

[132] Hout, Grains, 1.

[133] Hout, Grains, 3.

[134] For further information see: The Guardian, (Wednesday 27 August, 2003 17:06), <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/aug/26/guardianobituaries>.

[135] Hout p 3 or 113

Thesiger declares it: "a memorial to a vanished past, a tribute to a once magnificent people."[136]

The Arab in Bowles' text

Within this tradition of depicting the Arab and the desert, which Bowles seems to carry on in *The Sheltering Sky*, the nineteenth-century American literature continued explicitly to demonise the Arab Other, associating him with bestiality, irrationality and madness. In *Orientalism*, Said exposes the way the Oriental is depicted in Western literature. The representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East and North Africa are confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role is to represent the larger ensemble from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe. An Orientalist is usually considered the producer for whom Europe at large is audience, in the way that an audience is historically and culturally responsible for a piece of a certain dramatist. In the depths of this oriental stage, a prodigious cultural heritage stands to evoke a fabulously rich world: the Sphinx, Cleopatra, Eden, and Genii, in addition to settings, in some cases non-existent names, half-imagined and half-known such as monsters, devils, heroes, terrors and pleasures. The European imagination was nourished extensively from this repertoire. Major authors as Ariosto, Milton, Tasso, Shakespeare, and Cervantes drew on the Orient's riches for their productions, in ways that sharpened the outlines of imaginary, ideas, and figures populating it. The way

[136] Wilfred Patrick Thesiger, *Arabian Sands,* (1959) travel writing classic, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 9.

the West represented the Orient and its Arabs (a simple way to define the people of extremely mixed origins) implies the dominant position of the first, while the latter becomes mere representative figures or archetypes, heroes and myths located in a remote space.

The representation of the Arab unveils the vision that the dominant culture of nineteenth-century America nourishes on about the Orient. The American conception of the Orient operates around two polarities that are in opposition: fascination with Oriental myths on the one hand and demonization of the Arab as individual, on the other. However, many writers focus on the perils "of both unbridled fascination and careless demonization of the Orient,"[137] whereas the first leads to a form of alienation and split from reality, the second begets self-created fear from which makes America the generator of its own nightmares. What remains in the communal memory of the nineteenth century, as Said exhibits, is only 'paraphernalia of camels', flying castles and diamonds. In few words, the representations are certainly "Orientalising the Orient."[138]

Bowles' attitude towards the Other is also shown in the depiction of the Arab in *The Sheltering Sky*. Port's real interaction with the Arab happens rarely. One example is his encounter with the one who takes him to Marhnia. Using a cinematographic technique of fixing light, he says

> As he rose to his feet he heard steps above him at the end of the street. A figure stood at the top of the embankment. It did not speak, yet Port was certain that it had seen him, had followed him, and knew he was sitting down there. It lit a cigarette, and for a moment he saw an Arab wearing a

[137] Said, *Orientalism*, 76.

[138] Said, *Orientalism*, 5-6.

> chechia on his head. The match, thrown into the air made a finding parabola, the face disappeared, and only the red point of the cigarette remained.[139]

For Port, unlike the usual foreigners, the face of the Arab has no importance. Instead, he focuses on his voice, his distorted French, his way of insisting, his way of starting a conversation. Then strikingly he sheds light on the heads in the café, all with a red *chechia* or white turbans that was the only case of generalisation to which he reacts asking about the Arab in a male dominated space. He, also, describes the walk through the town without revealing anything beyond linguistic. It may appear strange for the reader of Bowles that his text is devoid of feelings, almost attribute free. For this reason to find the expression of racial judgement is a difficult task in *The Sheltering Sky*. This aspect of his work could easily be detected in his later works when his political standing point becomes sharp and explicit.

Bowles facing his fictional Others

In the early decades of the twentieth century, American modernists crossed the Atlantic "from a world they felt was overly secure" to engage in "voluntary homelessness," a "tourism" looking voyeuristically "elsewhere" for "markers of reality and authenticity."[140] For Caren Kaplan, this is "an act in consonance with imperialist nostalgia"[141] and not one about "fuller understanding of the histories and particularities of the places they have travelled through."[142] Although Bowles was engaged by many aspects of this same modernist

[139] Bowles, *SS*, 16.

[140] Kaplan Caren, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke UP, 1996), 238.

[141] Caren, *Questions,* 238.
[142] Caren, *Questions,* 238.

process when he left the United States for Paris in 1929, "a year of Modernist monuments," he quickly tired of "the binary model of modernity, oscillating between past and present, home and away, centre and periphery" and sought a different form of experience.[143] Bowles' work interrogates the "escape fantasies" of the expatriate, like Port and Stenham, who "did not think of himself as a tourist" hurrying "back home," but as a traveller who, "belonging no more to one place than to the next, moves slowly, over a period of years, from one part of the earth to another."[144] The novels describe their Western protagonists' exile and their desire for "singularity, solitude, estrangement, alienation" as a part of their individual salvation in the Sahara.[145]

The awareness of the futility of the "romantic desire" to "lose oneself" is played out in *The Sheltering Sky* and *The Spider's House* where displaced characters are typically made uneasy and uncertain with their value systems pierced and chastised; for it is "the transportation of characters ... [that] acts as a catalyst or a detonator, without which there'd be no action."[146] Port Moresby, for example, journeys deep into the Sahara because "the very silences and emptiness... touched his soul... [with] solitude and the proximity to infinite things,"[147] in an impossible quest: "The landscape was there, and more than ever he felt he could not reach it. The rocks and the sky were everywhere, ready to absolve him, but as always he carried the obstacle within him."[148] Similarly, Stenham in *The Spider's House* hated those Muslims who had "forsaken the concept of a static world to embrace a dynamic one," preferring to hold on to a predefined notion of the East as "natural" and

[143] Caponi, *Paul,* 16.

[144] Bowles, *SS*, 26.

[145] Caponi, *Paul,* 8.

[146] Caponi, *Paul,* 8.

[147]Bowles, *SS*, 46.

[148] Bowles, *SS*, 46-7.

"eternal."[149] He depicts life in the North African space where cultures collide. It offers a vision of the colonial contact whose common denominator is greed. Within this apparently dynamic atmosphere, the protagonists believe they can transform reality by travelling. In confronting the Other, Port and Stenham's romantic dreams are destroyed and their values revealed and analysed as part of the system of global "monoglossia"[150] referred to in Bowles' travel writings, where "human behaviour is becoming everywhere less differentiated."[151]

The central idea of Bowles' literature is the colourful relationship between the East and the West, one which Said has done much to explicate in his study of Orientalism. In the novels we chose to offer a complete vision of the North African desert, the relationship between Orient and West as the seducer and the seduced is rather confusing. An Orient that fights the coloniser but imitates the West and a West that denigrates the Orient but spends blood and gold to possess it. The quests are ended brutally; Port dies and Stenham loses the last hope of authenticity running behind his fast evading car. What one learns here is that the construction of viewpoints other than one's own can lead to a way out of the spider's house, if not for the characters in the story, then at least for readers. One is able to transcend the narrow confines of one's own experience. Moreover, the vehicle needed to carry us out of our own cultural experiences must be particularly well crafted. The car as a symbol of modernity like any invention of the West leaves the native behind in their loss and confusion. What is most important, at this juncture, is the indeterminate relation of character to setting. Bowles' peculiar backgrounds are designed to enhance the drama of quest and perdition on his fictional stage. North

[149]Bowles, *SH*, 252.

[150] Bakhtin's concept in Neil Campbell, *The Hero*, 12.

[151] Caponi, *Paul,* 16.

Africa presents a vivid tableau of a place in fading colours, but the settings of Bowles are in the service of another cause. When a character, such as Port and Stenham, leaves New York for the North African desert, he is not merely leaving one city for another space but also making a movement into a medieval era. What they achieve is an abrupt transition from one civilization to another which is callously regressive.

Furthermore, Bowles' treatment of natives is decidedly related to his settings. In contrast with South American Indians, the Arabs and Berbers earn his guarded antipathy. These last are invested with a certain accuracy of gesture and stance. The accuracy, however, is external, and the concern is too often with the salient, the colourful, or the collective trait. Yet to surmise immediately that for Bowles an Arab slipping by in his burnouse is after all but part of the Sahara and the hundred strange smells of the Kasbah is to miss the point. The clue is in a brief interchange between the semi-westernized, semi-educated Arab, Thami, and the uncouth pervert, Eunice Good, a rich American resident of Tangier. "You want us all to be snake-charmers and scorpion eaters," Thami rages, giving way to his nationalist bitterness, to which Miss Good provokingly retorts, "Naturally. ... It would be far preferable to being a nation of tenth-rate pseudo-civilized rug-sellers." Bowles' antipathy has its motive, and the motive is consonant with his central theme. To Bowles the Arab world has grafted on its native skin the worst from a culture he is tacitly convicting, keeping neither the primitive candour of the native nor the precarious stability of the West.

The impression immediate to receive from Bowles' novels, and from the majority of his stories, is one of violence, one of terror and negation. So far, I have been engaged in pointing to correlatives between that exterior of violence and the central theme of quest and decay. No such correlation would

be complete without reference to the peculiar transpositions of human relations in Bowles' fiction.

Cruelty and perversion, dominant as they are in so many contacts of Bowles' characters, seem the dramatic proof of a radical impossibility, the impossibility of love. Human relationships are often, with scarcely a few exceptions, shown as sterile or intolerable, though at times also implausible. Rape, incest, lesbianism, homosexuality, adultery, and simple betrayal, with all their attending virulence, betoken the most complete negation of human love to which a novelist may refer. Estrangement and loneliness – of Kit and Port, of Dyar, of Thami, of the couple in "Call at Corazon," of the native in "Under the Sky," of the father and son in "Pages from Cold Point," and of the mother and daughter in "The Echo" – express a situation in which fear of meaninglessness compels each character to entrench himself in the narrowest corner of his selfhood. Hence, the age is an Age of Monsters,[152] and "monsters," like Iago, cannot be reconciled to the existence of good in humanity. Ihab Hassan declares that Bowles' characterises evil and ugliness to question "human relationships, isolation, and the condition of lovelessness in a way sociology is helpless to question."[153] In his exploring quest of the desert, Bowles elects his fictive Others to explore the Sahara inside.

Bowles and the Other as space

In dealing with *The Sheltering Sky*, one has to relate it to the original and fundamental pioneering journey: the Westerner's desertion of a highly modernized home in search of a vague idea of freedom and authenticity. This torch of enlightenment is what gives travellers a desire to explore the unknown, and distinguish them from their people. Port's journey is a West

[152] "Age of Monsters" is Bowles' title of a section of *Let It Come Down.*

[153] Ihab Hassan, *Rumors of Change: Essays of Five Decades*, (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 36.

man's journey towards the exploration of the non-European Other and towards self-exploration. In other words, it is the voyage back to origin and identity, adjustment and restructuring.[154]

Critics of *The Sheltering Sky,* Foltz and Campbell for example, consider the Western man's voyage into wilderness towards self-exile and maddening as the main idea of the novel. Indeed, the theme of *The Sheltering Sky* centres on the quests. On the one hand, the quest may be considered inward as a self-exploring journey. On the other hand, the quest is set for a new approach to the previously colonised space, which means writing the desert from a post-colonial perspective. The first approach seems to find its existential angst in *The Sheltering Sky,* Port embodies details of Bowles' life in Morocco and stands for the Westerner who seeks his identity and individualism by experiencing loss, exile, and displacement in the other part of the world; while the second seems to be answered by Bowles' later novel and translations, where he cuts short with the colonial literature from Defoe to expatriate writers. For Bowles, America and "americanness" are not easily graspable notions, whereas the Other is a cherished and imagined land.

For example, the narrator in *The Sheltering Sky* puts forward his ideas about "Englishness" with Lyle and Eric. By depicting Mrs Lyle while looking for tea in the desert Bowles uses a technique of auto-reference recalling Marhania's tale of "the tea in the Sahara". While the three native girls long for tea as an aesthetic experience, Mrs Lyle is complaining of the quality of the tea in the desert. The probing for "Englishness" and "Americanness" is perceived by Port as a puzzling exercise. In the novel, Tunner is portrayed as the perfect American, who care about manners and order. In different scenes, Tunner shows his elegant behaviour to Kit, and in the end of novel when she is in the

[154] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), 288.

middle of chaos, he remained after her to bring everything into order. Port escapes from Tunner to save Jane from the morbid torpor that the American "friend" stands for. Tunner, becomes the shadow of the culture Port strives to avoid. Port's "migratory and volatile spirit"[155] springs out of the most established and deeply rooted culture. His continual movement translates into the fact that the little possibility of action in the villages he meets does not satiate his alien soul. He moves towards the heart of dryness and solitude.

The Sheltering Sky is written during the colonial era and it is an anti-colonial experience, which recounts a journey for the authentic space. Although its theme is different, *The Sheltering Sky* is modelled on the nineteenth and early twentieth century romances of the (im)possible encounter with the Other. As Tayeb declares, this characteristic of space exploration is a main features also in the modernist colonial novel for instance, "*Heart of Darkness, Kim A Passage to India*", and *The Children of Violence* that "revolve around the hub" of a colonial voyage and "foreground spatiality" rather than characterisation, she carries on

> Conrad's meandering, labyrinthine river, plumbing the depths of the jungle; Kipling's expansive, heat-exhaling India; and Forster's majestic Marabar Caves somehow become protagonists that swallow up the dimension of temporality and the weight of character. The modernist narrative vision, however, does not totally diffuse its temporality. It keeps itself within the grids of history and ideology. The voyage speaks both its temporality and ideological vision through the pivotal experience of space mediated by an alien, displaced, white selfhood.[156]

Port's aesthetic quest is strongly impressed by the spatial experience, especially the indelible influence of the North African desert. The first

[155] Lamia, Tayeb, "Martha's Odyssey: the Motif of the Journey in Doris Lessing's The Children of Violence", <http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v7i2/ltayeb.htm> (09/12/2014, 00:12), 5.
[156] Tayeb, Martha, 5.

glimpse of Port in the narrative is as a lonely individual in an alien land. His way into the North African desert is motivated by his own desire to "break with the past, with what he had been".[157] Allen Hibbard goes as far as to call Bowles a visionary who has witnessed the horrors of "the heart of Darkness."[158] Foltz says

> Bowles's prose is frequently characterized by a terrifying and macabre stillness that scarcely masks a cruel and compassionless universe. The stories re-create multiple forms of psychological isolation and alienation and their insidious effects on the human mind in a remote, almost clinical manner, emphasizing the outsider's point of view telling the story.[159]

Indeed, the novel on traveling through the North African desert foregrounds the protagonists' synergy with the setting more than his development and his interplay with other characters. Port's feelings seem to be frozen and his expression is more sarcastic than intellectually engaged, which may lead us to notice the way the setting of the quest is aggrandised while characterization and description are given a limited space in the novel. In his distinction between the tourist and the traveller, Port shows a rather world-open vision of his quest in the beginning of *The Sheltering Sky*

> He didn't think of himself as a tourist; he was a traveller. The difference is partly one of time, he would explain. Whereas the tourist generally hurries back home at the end of a few weeks or months, the traveller, belonging no more to one place than the next, moves slowly, over a period of years, from one part of the world to another. [...] For, as he claimed another important difference between tourist and traveller is that the former accepts his own civilization without question; not so the traveller, who compares with others, and rejects those elements he finds not to his liking.[160]

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157 *Millicent Dillon, "Tracing Paul Bowles", Raritan (Rutgers University, Vol 17; Number 3, 1998),* <http://www.paulbowles.org/books1.html>, (Feb 2012), 47-63.

158 Hibbard, *Paul*, 2004, 3.

159 Foltz, Paul, 88.

160 Bowles, *SS*, 1.

Accordingly, Port sees in himself the universal traveller who has already debunked the cultural legacies that divide people into nations. Instead, he highlights mobility or movement as life and sees the landscape in the romantic dichotomy of nature/nurture. The journey leads to no firm position. The protagonists start to move from one place to the other aimlessly as if they are haunted by a shadow. The desert appeals their desire to go forward and avoid the return. At a certain point of the journey, they realise that the "terrible light" of the desert is no longer blinding,

> Slowly her eyes grew accustomed to the terrible brightness [...].She shook her head dumbly. He handed her the paper and she saw, written on it in her own hand, the words: "CANNOT GET BACK."[161]

Kit believes in the freedom in the desert. She has simply incorporated the desert, immersed herself in its sands, and dismembered her body for her infinite lovers. Kit deconstructs her identity, tearing it up between the Western "I" and the desert's Other. She ends up dwelling queerly at an in-between state of an American and a Tuareg and a woman in man's attire. This "identity is the embryo of the universal consciousness" that Bowles and Port develop.[162]

At this level, the desert is the focus of our analysis through which we seek a better understanding of this space, including non-desert for many reasons. First, the desert belongs politically to South Mediterranean countries that combine sea and desert, fertile green and dry yellow lands. Second, the Western traveller, who seeks a different landscape from his natural one, cannot understand the space unless relating it to the national history. Third, the northern strip is considered white; a colour that becomes darker moving southward until it becomes the African black. These are briefly the reasons

[161] Bowles, *SS*, 118.

[162] Tayeb, Martha, 18.

to refer to Bowles' 1967 novel, *The Spider's House*, a book where the reader can fully grasp Bowles' political and poetic ideas. In 1967 and twenty years after *The Sheltering Sky*, Bowles' view of the space matured and became the fruit of his personal breadth rather than an outcome of breeding tradition.

The Northern part of Africa is a space in-between: between Africa and Europe. It is also called *Maghreb* (or West) for the East and the Orient for the West. It is portrayed as the land of intersections, crossings, and overlaps of various identities. *Mezzaterra*[163] may be the best expression to summarise the North African dilemma. It is a term coined by Ahdaf Soueif, as a title of her collection, and examined by Tanja Stampfl in her dissertation on Maghreb. Stampfl argues

> The word *mezzaterra* is an a original term; Soueif created it by combining the two Italian words for "half" or "middle" *mezza* and "world" or "ground" *terra*, thus literally invoking the middle ground, an expression of compromise and balance and the global potential for this concept. A meeting ground, no less, which is never quite complete as the "half" or *mezza* indicates. It is necessarily fragmentary.[164]

This meeting ground in colours, shapes and cultures dismantles the dictates of the awkward attempt at identifying it on world map. The North of North

[163] A concept used by Ahdaf Soueif in *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground*. The book description says: "'Globalisation is happening. It is driven by economics, ideology and communications. But does this have to entail the annexation of chunks of the world by the Great Power of any given moment? Surely that is the path to constant conflict, to grief and misery. There is another way: to inhabit and broaden the common ground. This is the ground where everybody is welcome, the ground we need to defend and to expand. It is in Mezzaterra that every responsible person on this planet now needs to pitch their tent. This is the ground from which this book is calling." Ahdaf Soueif is one of the finest commentators of our time. Her clear-eyed reporting is syndicated throughout the world, and these essays, written between 1981 and the present, are collected here for the first time. They are the direct result of Soueif's own circumstances of being, as she puts it, "like hundreds of thousands of others: people with an Arab or a Muslim background doing daily double-takes when faced with their reflection in a western mirror". From visiting Palestine and entering the Noble Sanctuary for the first time, to interpretations of women who choose to wear the veil, and to post-September 11th commentary, these selected essays are always perceptive, fearless, intelligent and necessary."

[164] Tanja Stampfl, *(Im)Possible Encounters, Possible (Mis)Understanding Between the West and its Other: the Case of the Maghreb*, (Loiusiana State University: May 2009), 2.

Africa is the "melting pot" of Mediterranean and European Cultures (Phoenician, Roman, Spanish, Berber, Arabic, Turkish, Andalusian, Jewish and African origins). The centre is more arabised and the South is shared between Tuareg, African and Arabian Desert cultures. For the American continent, Morocco, where Bowles lived for circa fifty-two years, is the Eastern Atlantic Coast, or the "Other". However, beyond geographical location, Bowles/Port cherished the Non-American, the non-city life, a counter example to the colonial novels that praised the nationalist "I" by obsessively seeking return. Are not the North African desert and the North African region a lost utopian setting for *The Sheltering Sky*? Is it a writer's exile? What is the difference that marks space otherness?

The colonial writer's receptivity and work on the Other's land and culture are at the core of the modern redefining of world space, and the global understanding of cultures and peoples. Various writers who depicted some experience of colonial settlement, such as Forster, Lessing, Orwell, Greene, confronted this issue at the beginning of the twentieth-century. They represented the inadequacy of a system and portrayed its flaws. The colonial writer is also weighted by an additional burden of emotional instability in front of the dilemma of desiring or rejecting the Other's land. They are perhaps tormented by an ambivalence or "fear/desire oscillation"[165] that characterizes his/her interplay with the Other.

In this historical and literary context, *The Sheltering Sky* and Bowles' other texts were written, responding to the Western culture by belonging to it and by providing a counter vision to expand on its limits. As the Western traveller par-excellence, this oscillation between "phobia" and "philia" is particularly

[165] Azim Firdous, *The Colonial Rise of the Novel*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 11.

pertinent.[166] For many exiled writers, like Bowles, the Other is not that space, to whom climatic, floral, faunal and cultural features represent home. It is rather an imaginary, ideal model of spatial and cultural authenticity, still without the influence of Western civilisation. If other writers cling to double identities and belonging, *The Sheltering Sky*'s protagonists are freed from the a/the frail sense of belonging to the metropolis as the main spring of the inimical feeling of alienation and discomfort. Bowles' characters usually live a malaise of belonging to a clear delineated culture that takes them through those ages far from the simple and the authentic. Like Bowles, these characters portray America from a negative perspective. In *The Sheltering Sky*, for instance, Kit's wandering being transcends the feeling of exile and alienation, through a mystical communion with the desert. She prefers to belong to nowhere.

The colonial mode of settlement as violent action of importation and implementation of a metropolitan model into the colonised space had been usually the tradition of colonial writers. Bowles, in his counter-colonial romance, depicts it in the French and British characters in *The Sheltering Sky*. The Lyles are a mother and her son, who travel through North Africa in their white Mercedes to write a guidebook. Their vehicle in 1947, when the novel is set, is an evidence of their privileged social position. Its white colour as opposed to the "heart of wilderness" sets the racial difference between the Lyles and the inhabitants of North Africa. They show off their difference by the mere act of travelling in their white luxurious Mercedes through desert villages. Following the usual manners of travel writers, the Lyles travel with the aim to go home as real explorers. Their nostalgia for their homeland builds the gap between them and the culture they are invoking in their book.

[166] Firdous, *Colonial,* 11.

They show their disdain for and refuse of the Other; their map highlights the touristic roads, hotels and sites and everything produced by the West.

Unlike Port, the Lyles refuse the native people, judging them, and reporting their impressions to the homeland. Travelling in the same circle of culturally pre-existing stereotypes, the Lyles observe: "[The Arabs] are a stinking low race of people, with nothing to do in life but spy on others. How else do you think they live? [...] They hate us all. Moreover, so do the French. Oh, they loathe us!"[167] Their exploration had been preceded by their overt disdain for everybody and everything as they show off their radical belief in the British superiority that the narrative resists, mocks and debunks at every level. The Lyles are caricatured and despised by the narrator for their absurd behaviour. They are supposed to explore the land and the "people" that they strive to fit to their modelled stereotypes. "Their actions and interactions with others reveal their base characters, their moral corruption, and their pathetic lives".[168]

Apart from their provocative presence on the threshold of the text as colonial and orientalist figures, the Lyles are portrayed as outsiders to the ideas that Bowles/Port expresses in the romance. They are antagonists for Port in that they extend the Western attitudes he flees. They embody the West in an abortive processing of the Other. They are portrayed as the British colonial personage *par excellence*; they show off their wealth (Mercedes), their obsession with whiteness (the colour of their Mercedes), but they generate repulsiveness and loathing everywhere and to everyone if non-British. In the very start of the narrative, the Lyles are anonymously depicted as unmannered, condescending, simplistic and dishonest. The narrator exhibits

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167 Bowles, *SS*, 71.

168 Sampfl, *(Im)Possible*, 88.

their attitudes in one of the instances, "Hello, mother. Come in and sit down!" The woman moved to the youth's side but did not sit. In her excitement and indignation, she seems not to have noticed Port. Her voice was very high. "Eric, you filthy toad! [...] You wretched boy!"[169] This is the first time Port sees the Lyles and one can imagine the embarrassment in a hotel bar. The way the woman behaves with Eric is another instance to show how they do not even cope with each other. Tunner complicates the picture when he discovers that Eric and Mrs Lyle have a sexual relationship, an incident to underline their devious nature. Hypocrisy is another feature of their depiction in *The Sheltering Sky*. Eric stole Port's passport, though he drives a Mercedes in the desert. Then the reader sees the manifestations of hate and disrespect for the French. Mrs Lyle says:

> I'm very glad you can come with us. It's an added protection. They say in the mountains here it's better to carry a gun. Although I must say I've never seen an Arab I couldn't handle. It's the beastly French one really needs protection from. Filthy lot! Fancy their telling me what I had yesterday for tea. But the insolence! Eric, you coward! You let me do all the fighting at the desk. You probably ate the biscuits they were charging me for![170]

Their hate for the French can be explained by the French occupation of North Africa that limits the "supremacy" of the British free movement in the region. However, the Lyles show their scepticism and paranoia when they speak to Port of their trip towards the desert,

> They started up, Eric at the wheel, racing the motor first. The porters shouted: "Bon voyage!" "I notice several people staring at me when I left," said Mrs Lyle, settling back. "Those filthy Arabs have done their work here, the same as everywhere else."
>
> "Work? What do you mean?," said Port.

[169] Bowles, SS, 17.

[170] Bowles, *SS*, 24.

> "Why, their spying. They spy on you all the time here, you know. That's the way they make their living. You think you can do anything without their knowing it?" She laughed unpleasantly. "Within an hour all the miserable little touts and undersecretaries at the consulates know everything."
>
> "You mean the British consulate?"
>
> "All of the consulates, the police, the banks, everyone," she said firmly.
>
> Port looked at Eric expectantly. "But..."
>
> "Oh, yes," said Eric, apparently happy to reinforce his mother's statement. "It's a frightful mess. We never have a moment's peace. Wherever we go, they hold back our letters, they try to keep us out of hotels [...] they search [...] and steal our things, [...]"
>
> "But who? Who does all this? And why?"
>
> "The Arabs!" cried Mrs Lyle. "They are a stinking low race of people [...]."
>
> "It seems incredible [...]"
>
> "Hah!", she said in a tone of triumph.[171]

In the novel, the Lyles stand for the British coloniser who invents reasons to justify his actions. The narrator highlights the "we" versus "they" construct and entertains his reader with the schizophrenic attitude of the couple who strive to attribute all the negative action to the "they" and to victimise the "we." They, or the Others, are the cause of the trouble of the Lyles who set themselves into an adventure to write a guidebook that seems never to end; they are completely displaced and alienated by the text. Inside, "they still cling to old fantasies of power and wealth," says Sampfl, "but no longer the colonial masters."[172] They continue to speak of good manners in a vulgar and debased way. Port thinks in an interior monologue,

> The novelty of the caricature was wearing off [...] their obsessions depressed him [Mrs Lyle's] Entire conversation consisted of descriptions in

171 Bowles, *SS*, 24-5.

172 Sampfl, *(Im)Possible*, 90.

> detail of the persecutions to which she believed she had been subjected to [...] the bitter quarrels. Her life had been devoid of personal contracts [...] each fight was an abortive attempt at establishing some kind of human relationship. Even with Eric, she had come to accept the dispute as the natural mode of talking.[173]

Then, the narrator shows the Lyle's mission to civilise the locals of Boussif: "When they came to Boussif [...], Mrs Lyle said: "I shall go directly to the kitchen and set about to showing them how to make tea."[174] This scene is important to postcolonial critics in the way it pinpoints the colonial attitude of supremacy entering everywhere; the coloniser dwells to teach and preach. Then while the British family thinks to teach the locals how to prepare tea or to behave, its identity is contaminated by oriental manners. This happens when Eric asks money from Port, then "in oriental fashion, Eric had bowed his head in agreement."[175] They arouse the protagonist's sentiments of resentment as he thought, "Mrs Lyle was a sour, fat, gabby female, and Eric her spoilt sissy brat grown up; those were his sentiments and he didn't think he would change them."[176] The antagonism between the Westerners in *The Sheltering Sky* continues in representing their conflict over the land and possessions. Indeed, the French dominated North Africa in the narrative. Sampfl says, "If the Lyles allegorize the declining British Empire, the French characters symbolize the existing colonial structure in the Maghreb and the complex relations between France and the United States [...]."[177]

In the 1940s, a date most significant for the North African Nationalists, Bowles puts forward a frame completely different from the (post)colonial

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173 Bowles, *SS*, 26.

174 Bowles, *SS*, 27.

175 Bowles, *SS*, 39.

176 Bowles, *SS*, 100.

177 Sampfl, *(Im)Possible*, 91.

reading. He pinpoints it as historical fact in his portrayal of the North African desert, which includes the different presence in the desert and the way Port sees and lives it. In our study of these presences, we will try to depict the French characters as we did for the English.

The French presence, as a colonial power in the region, dictates dealing with his dictates in order to have access to the region; and so if Port aims at exploring the land, he needs to deal with the French: by benefitting from his institutions, his buildings, his supplied services like the infrastructure, health care, army, maps etc. The narrator of *The Sheltering Sky* narrows his scope focusing on France as a military presence; though in reality there were businesspersons, administrators and artists. The French are compared to the liberal and independent American and English travellers. The first example is lieutenant d'Armagnac that is depicted as a secondary character in the novel. Lieutenant d'Armagnac, the commander of the military post in Bou Noura, emerges as the coloniser par excellence. According to Sampfl, "The novel showcases the almost overdone caricature of the lazy, racist colonial, who is obnoxiously full of himself."[178] The narrator describes him thus:

> As commander of the military post of Bou Noura, Lieutenant d'Armagnac found the life there full if somewhat unvaried. […]. Then there had been the natives. The lieutenant was intelligent enough to insist on allowing himself the luxury of not being snobbish about the indigenous population. His overt attitude toward the people of Bou Noura was that they were an accessible part of a great, mysterious tribe from whom the French could learn a great deal if they only would take the trouble. […]. the other soldiers at the post, who would have enjoyed seeing all the natives put behind barbed wire and left there to rot in the sun ("... comme on a fait en Tripolitaine[…]. The lieutenant's true enthusiasm for the natives had lasted three years. About

178 Sampfl, *(Im)Possible*, 147.

> the time, he had grown tired of his half dozen or so Ouled Nayl mistresses, the period of his great devotion to the Arabs came to an end.[179]

The quotations from *The Sheltering Sky* seem to be quite atypical of Bowles, whose style is rather subtle and discreet. As he did with the English, the narrator uses irony in his depiction of a 'commander', through the allusion to stereotypes one can find in the literature on colonial officers. The lieutenant shows his racism towards the natives in his belief in his cultural superiority. Second, he thinks his mission is rather to civilise the pre-historical natives and to better their lives. Three, he is surrounded by his rather "exotic" and exciting local mistresses. Four, his own vices/caprices end up with a tragedy on the local inhabitants. Yet, his presence, military, civil, and personal, is minimal. He is portrayed as a man without philosophy and theory, just the opposite of Port's aesthetic vision of life. The omniscient narrator offers us an outsider's stereotyped image of the American in the French officer's monologue,

> "Another stroke of bad luck," he thought. "Why must it be an American?" With a Frenchman he would have known how to go about persuading him to do it without any unpleasantness. But with an American! Already he could see him: a gorilla-like brute with a fierce frown on his face, a cigar in the corner of his mouth, and probably an automatic in his hip pocket. Doubtless no complete sentences would pass between them because neither one would be able to understand enough of the other's language. He began trying to recall his English: "Sir, I must to you, to pray that you will."[180]

D'Armagnac is worried about the encounter with what he imagines as "savage-brute" and "gorilla-like" American. These French clichés can be read as the narrator's universal view of how cultures misunderstand one another in general and that it is not only a West/East controversy. "Controlling the

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179 Bowles, *SS*, 55.

180 Bowles, *SS*, 58.

territory, the French are inevitable mediators, translators, and facilitators."[181] This is how another French official, Captain Broussard, in El Ga'a, puts it in providing some facilities to the protagonists. The overwhelming presence of the French is evinced by the pervasive use of the French language in the text. The language is rather a *trait d'union* between the Arabs, the Americans and the French. It is quite noticeable from the first encounter between the American tourists and the locals.

In fact, the study of the French language and characters helps to paint the image of different characters, in their relationship to their nationalities, cultures and colonial presence in North Africa. The French are satirized but less than are the English in *The Sheltering Sky*. Their presence is "precarious, humorous at times but also central to the construction of identities and power."[182] The complexity of the interaction between cultures through characters is often significant for the narrator whose American identity seems to be significant for Sampfl when she declares

> The American tourists signal the dawning era of neo-capitalism, an economic wielding of power over other countries rather than a military occupation. [...] The official role of the United States as liberators of Europe and the consequent exposure of atrocities and genocide committed by European dictators like Hitler and Mussolini, in combination with the relative inefficiency of Great Britain, France and Russia to stop the spread of fascism, create an image of the United States as a powerful, courageous and guiltless nation: committed to democracy, standing up to evil, and helping friends in need.[183]

Accordingly, Sampfl translates the romance from her (post)colonial perspective. Nevertheless, she neglects, in this respect, to mention that the

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181 Bowles, *SS*, 95.

182 Bowles, *SS*, 99.

183 Sampfl, *(Im)Possible*, 99-100.

United States of the period is the native country of both the writer and the protagonist. At this junction, why is North Africa considered pure, authentic and original by Port? Is it his last utopic dream?

Port's North African desert

Caponi is one of many critics that agree on the massive presence of Bowles' biographical elements in his novels. Following this view, one deduces that Port, and Bowles behind him, start their journey by leaving all the Americans behind. In fact, they escape the domination of Wall Street as the economic beating heart of the globe to look for a dwelling, a re-born "I". Unlike his American contemporary expatriates, Bowles (and Port by extension) did not look to the Old World as his new direction, but chose to live fifty-two years and to die in North Africa. The North African land is predominantly Sahara and the major part of his stories inhabits this space. The desert in world culture, as the previous chapters show, is considered the origin, the pure land free from corruption and betrayal. The quester looks for that experience.

He sets the quest in three parts: Port, Kit and Tunner (three characters with different facets of the American culture). Critics, like Caponi and Sawyer, adopt an existential reading of *The Sheltering Sky*, considering the final failure of the quests: Port dies of typhoid, Kit loses her mind in the desert and Tunner tries to behave as a perfect gentleman. Caponi and Sawyer identify Port with Bowles who probably flees his mother-country to chastise the bases of its culture, to mock capitalism and to challenge its political as well as social systems. In Morocco, Port/Bowles explores a cultural intermingling that steps over national and cultural boundaries. Fleeing the West in the aftermath of World War Two, Bowles through his different characters reaches

the awareness of how their anchored Europeanism is set against the North African context. Their physical voyage is the quest for their identities in the acts of escaping and recreating. While Port is the American thinker, Tunner is the simple American: a handsome bourgeois, who believes in romance. Kit becomes a motherly figure for Port and the desert, in a sudden moment of acceptance that became a promise of love and passion.

Port's/Bowles' representation of the North African desert in *The Sheltering Sky* extends over the narrative. It offers a contemplation of a "pure," self-contained and detached spatiality that takes heed of its human and temporal marks, and proceeds with a feminine adoption of the land and its culture. Through a free mind and body, loose and independent, Kit embodies Mother Nature. The sensual touch of the minute, free-floating life of nature in the desert, and the spiritual attainment of its timelessness, bestow a lost sense of harmony and origin on Kit's weary soul.

Port's penetration of the North African desert is triggered by ideas like originality. Considering the desert as an original space, the protagonists set their quest deep into the Sahara while their cultural backgrounds have specific expectations. They show a strong attachment to the desert as concept, namely a free boundless nature. In the end of *The Sheltering Sky*, for instance, the emotional interpretation reaches communion with the space.

Bowles belongs to the Beat generation and like Borroughs, Ginsberg and others, he rejected reason as the construct upon which European culture was built, for the sake of "intuitions, soul states, and affirmations of being."[184] He started his career looking for a romantic and inspiring place. Caponi records Bowles as having said that "Like any Romantic, I had always been vaguely certain that sometime during my life I should come into a magic place which,

[184] Hout, *Hybrid*, 115.

in revealing its secrets, would give me wisdom and ecstasy perhaps even death".[185]

His choice of living in the interzone of Tangier testifies to his disentanglement from culture altogether, his detachment from reality and his openness towards immensity. The desert is the protagonist of his work. He commented, "I love all those things: the sun, the silence, the nothingness. I had never been sure whether I liked those things."[186] Hout observes:

> The distinction between the sublime and the beautiful underpins the difference between loving and liking the desert, for whereas the former is absolute, abstract, and certain, the latter is relative, concrete, and contingent.[187]

The desert is pure and authentic, because it is free from the rational mechanism of the West. It is for Bowles the early "grain" of Utopia when he admits "landscape alone is of insufficient interest to warrant the effort it takes to see it," adding that "North Africa without its tribes, inhabited by [...] the Swiss, would be merely a rather more barren California" (vii)."[188]

For Bowles, the Sahara is part of his identity, even if he lived in Tangier; the wild space remained the reason of his first inhabiting North Africa. He denied the exotic interest in the space, defining

> I don't know what you mean by "exoticism" and "curiosities," really. "Exoticism" is that which is not of one's own country. Well, it is exotic in that

[185] Caponi, *Conversations*, 111. "Taghit was probably the most intensely poetic spot [he] had ever seen. (Without *Stopping* 282)."

[186]Hout, *Hybrid*, 116.

[187] Hout, *Hybrid*, 116.

[188]Hout, *Hybrid*, 116.

> sense, so is England very exotic, so is all of Europe, so is the entire world. . . . It's all exotic for an American.[189]

By travelling all the time and living spiritually in the Sahara, Bowles replaces the idea of a fixed home by what James Clifford calls "dwelling-in-traveling."[190] Moreover, he assumes in *The Sheltering Sky*, that "Europe has destroyed the whole world."[191] For this reason, the desert has become his refuge or the last "immaculate wilderness." In this respect Hout adds,

> Port reflects that "happiness, if there still was any, existed elsewhere," conceivably in sequestered rooms, shaded cafes, and tents, but most certainly "in the great Sahara, in the endless regions," as far as possible from "sad colonial [. . .] Europe" (Bowles, SS 52). Since the desert's landmark is its very lack thereof, i.e. its no-thingness, the connection with the Greek derived word Outopos,' which means 'no place,' becomes evident. While the desert does exist, its allure lies largely in its lack of specific features. It is onto this white page that Port hopes to paint his escapist dreams. The immensity of the desert reflected in the predominantly yellow and blue hues of its horizons the sandy vistas and the sky stands in stark contrast to confined and ashen Europe.[192]

For Port/Bowles, the Sahara is part of him. Wherever he decides to live, the desert inhabits him as he insists "this town, this river, this sky, all belong to [him] as much as to them."[193] If the Sahara for Port is an authentic space and a personal Utopia, it takes another aspect with Kit who is set free after her husband's death and takes on new interests.

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[189] Abdelhak ElGhandor, "Activism and Civilisation: An Interview with Paul Bowles", <http://ariel.ucalgary.ca/ariel/index.php/ariel/article/viewFile/114/111>, 17.

[190] James Clifford, "Notes on Theory and Travel", in Clifford et al, *Traveling Theories and Traveling Theorists*, (Santa Cruz: Center for Cultural Studies, 1989), 178.

[191] Bowles, *SS*, 58.

[192] Hout, *Hybrid*, 120-1.

[193] Bowles, *SS*, 122.

Kit the feminine desert

> "From a certain point onward there is no longer any turning back. That is the point that must be reached." -KAFKA

In the beginning of her trip, Kit was a perfect modern American. At one point in the narrative, she spreads out all her clothes to feel "civilised" and declares confidence by that she is "still American, you know. And I'm not even trying to be anything else."[194] It is Port who tries to be anything else from being American. With Tunner, she recognises her being an object of desire. When Port decides to share the trip with the Lyles and leaves Tunner and Kit together to take the train, Kit goes to a beauty parlour before she gets onto the train and into Tunner's arms. Kit, who has a multitude of phobias, is haunted and overshadowed by Port in all her decisions. In Tunner's arms, she "could no longer think, nor were there any more images in her head. She was aware only of the softness of the woollen bathrobe next to her skin, and then of the nearness and the warmth of a being that did not frighten her."[195] She started her trip with fears and anxiety; because her husband's egocentric behaviour confuses her. Kit and Port do not have a real marital life and they reduce marriage to companionship. She feels alienated as her husband takes her from one place to the next wandering in the desert. Sampfl argues

> Both Port and Kit are highly cerebral individuals. While Port feels comfortable in his abstractions and calculations, however, Kit craves closeness and does not reject her body needs. When Port has, he aims to

194 Bowles, *SS*, 161.

195 Bowles, *SS*, 88.

> possess another body,[196] while Kit in sex can finally possess herself [...] a liberating rather than oppressive act.[197]

Their sexual life seems to confront an end that the desert saves in the novel; while in the Bowles' life sex gave them no gratification. They drift apart and had different sexual partners but that did not mean they were not lovers. Sawyer-Lucanno admits that

> Publicly they seek to maintain the façade of marriage; defend each other against the outside, while internally feeling disquietude, vast uncertainty as to their actual mutuality. These are the elements that form the underpinning of the novel; and while Bowles will push the situation much further than it existed in actuality, it is as much these appropriations from psychological reality, as that from a physical experience of place, from his previous travels in the desert, that truly produce what Bowles has called "a novel from memory.[198]

Bowles puts in Port his own anxiety and frustration that Port transfers onto Kit. Not only his angst, Port transported his soul of the eternal traveller onto her the moment he dies. Kit recognises her love for him and extends it to the space. This is how Kit escapes to the desert. At this level, the story takes a feminist direction. On the light of feminism, Book III is purely Kit's when she herself becomes the desert. This marks a radical change from the passive wife who often follows her husband with no lofty goals, to the heroine of the North African desert. Hout conforms:

> Later, Kit flees into the desert to combat the specters of Tunner and Port and to discover a "further possibility in existence" (281). The desert will act here not as a springboard to madness but as a playground for further

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196 Bowles, *SS*, 139-140, The blind dancer, for example. "Now that she was gone he was persuaded, not that a bit of enjoyment has been denied him, but that he had lost love itself [...] In bed, without eyes to see beyond the bedshe would have been completely there, a prisoner."

197 Sampfl, *(Im)Possible*, 112.

198 Sawyer-Lucanno, *Invisible*, 267.

> experimenting with Western subjectivity. The desert is "too powerful an entity not to lend itself to personification" (263). Nowhere is this statement truer than in Kit's episode with Belqassim. She immerses herself in an outlandish situation in order to overcome the "ludicrous décor" of her previous life (255). Instead of "remembering all that had happened" with "a small effort," she "resolutely" takes the less travelled road (279). Eligibility for her "ridiculous game" (309) requires an adventurous spirit and temporary amnesia.[199]

In her way to riding the *The Sheltering Sky*'s narrative, Kit discovers her new identity with Belqassim in a totally self-giving experience. In joining a man with whom she can only communicate through her body, she sheds her identity "for the sake of a new one". Like a new-born, she goes back to the basic element: to live biologically her "naked body".[200] Kit took the rest of her life with Port and as an American woman in an overnight bag and she sets herself into a journey, a primitive one, almost speechless, instinctive; with the Tuareg caravan in its usual path through the desert. In her, Bowles encompasses all his ideas of the travel, as she does not need a nation to belong to, just like the North African desert whose sands resist the geo-political division. Thoughts and their signifiers ache her being. Laws and morals seem to be buried in a faraway modern land. She becomes the nowhere, or better, the Sahara according to Bowles in his earlier novels and stories: "even as she saw these two men she knew that she would accompany them, and the certainty gave her an unexpected power: instead of feeling the omens, she now would make them, be them herself."[201] Kit gives up her gender identity when she disguises herself as a male Tuareg to enter Belqassim's space with all its maxims and traditions. She reduces her life to a

[199] Hout, *Hybrid*, 123.

[200] Sampfl, *(Im)Possible*, 115.

[201] Bowles, *SS*, 268.

prison within his house; waiting his return to make love. In the end of the story, she leaves Belqassim's life and all the attempts to determine her identity, because the other wives were jealous of her and tried to disguise her.

When she escapes from the embassy, Kit demonstrates her determination not to be found and to limit herself to one particular identity - one that she has freely chosen and accepted. No compromise seems possible for Kit. She cannot navigate both cultures, but she has to disappear in order to emerge more completely. It needs a direct collision to renegotiate contact zones between cultures.[202] The important element is the space that she embodies, as she snuggles up to the core of the desert's mystery. Nature repeatedly infuses with a corporeal life and a personified touch that embraces Kit in a tender human clasp. Once on her own, Kit experiences a different "desert;" she feels it is especially exhilarating, it is assimilated to the erotic body that contains and embraces her. Her first venture into the sandy North Africa was through her physical longing to contain it and become it. In the desert

> landscape is always at its best in the half-light of dawn or dusk. The sense of distance lacks: a ridge nearby can be a far-off mountain range, each small detail can take on the importance of a major variant on the countryside's repetitious theme. The coming of day promises a change; it is only when the day has fully arrived that the watcher suspects it is the same day returned once again--the same day he has been living for a long time, over and over, still blindingly bright and untarnished by time. Kit breathed deeply, looked around at the soft line of the little dunes, at the vast pure light rising up from behind the Hamada's mineral rim, at the forest of palms behind her still immersed in night, and knew that it was not the same day. Even when it grew entirely light, even when the huge sun shot up, and the sand, trees and

[202] Bowles, *SS*, 117.

> sky gradually resumed their familiar daytime aspect, she had no doubts whatever about its being a new and wholly separate day.[203]

She feels empty when Port dies and she takes refuge in the open space. That was her maddening, wearisome way of facing life without Port. Her shelter was the openness of the desert and the hazardous first passing caravan; the dusty lap of a turbulent nature. Kit lost her social ties with the death of Port and decides to explore nature without civilizational restraints in a state of "innocent" and sensational living. And so, she opened herself like the open space of the desert towards Belqassim. Then, she becomes aware that her openness was still limited to one man; she thus flees him, Tunner, and the West. Her sudden awakening is rather "sensuous" and "wholly irrational," as she

> was conscious only of his lips and the breath coming from between them, sweet and fresh as a spring morning in childhood. There was an animal-like quality in the firmness with which he held her, affectionate, sensuous, wholly irrational-gentle but of a determination that only death could gainsay. She was alone in a vast and unrecognizable world, but alone only for a moment; then she understood that this friendly carnal presence was there with her. Little by little she found herself considering him with affection: everything he did, all his overpowering little attentions were for her. In his behavior there was a perfect balance between gentleness and violence that gave her particular delight. The moon came up, but she did not see it.[204]

The expressions "alone," "vast," "unrecognizable" and "irrational" account for Kit's new approach to life. The relationship between Kit and the desert, embodied by Belqassim and her, reveals another dimension of the Western exploration of the North African space. It was a physical adoration and a carnal contact devoid of "sense." This is one of the innovations Bowles brings

[203] Bowles, *SS*, 103.

[204] Bowles, *SS*, 105.

forth with a female protagonist, who can be compared to European male's sexual exploitation in many French novels. Furthermore, the quotation shows how Kit wants this affair and is never forced into as many critics would claim. The body, during the brief sensual revelry, is depicted in an animalistic speechless relationship that reveals Kit's integration in the desert. This process of gradual diffusion in the body of Nature reaches its peak as a sudden outburst of emotion in a complete inhalation and interiorisation of its wilderness or a direct interchangeability between the body as part of nature and the body as personal. The figure of the solitary woman in the midst of an outstretched desert openness of horizon provides the slow decomposition of body and soul. The body transforms into an open space whose limits are obliterated just like Port's desert and it seems an immense infinity.

> By her mattress was a tiny square window with iron grillwork across the opening; a nearby wall of dried brown mud cut off all but a narrow glimpse of a fairly distant section of the city. The chaos of cubical buildings with their flat roofs seemed to go on to infinity, and with the dust and heat-haze it was hard to tell just where the sky began.[205]

The physical integration into space is the way Kit communicates spiritually with nature. It denotes what one can describe as Kit's "ecstatic epiphany of nature."[206] In Book III, the narrator tries to capture in textuality an evasive, transient moment of natural epiphany. During her stay in Belqassim's house, she seems to contemplate a strong physical presence rather than an elucidated mind. Kit experiences an unconscious process of annihilation and self-effacement.

[205] Bowles, *SS*, 109.

[206] Hout, *Hybrid*, 124.

> When he climbed the steps of the bed, parted the curtains, entered and reclined beside her to begin the slow ritual of removing her garments, the hours she had spent doing nothing took on their full meaning. And when he went away the delicious state of exhaustion and fulfilment persisted for a long time afterward; she lay half awake, bathing in an aura of mindless contentment, a state which she quickly grew to take for granted, and then, like a drug, to find indispensable.[207]

But Kit's reaching of oneness with nature does make a revelation. It illuminates to her the insignificance of the human element in the huge machinery that drives the life cycle of nature. The individual life struggle and childhood dreams are absurdly worthless and inconsequential in this mixture of elements sorted and intertwined by an ineluctable and adamant natural law. Despite this painful revelation, Kit reaches her "utopic" state of harmony with the surroundings. This is what explains her final escape from the Western world.

Tunner may be the bad example of the American handsome gentleman and an awkward bachelor, who looks for egocentric adventures and fixing the mess that his egoism causes. On the other hand, Kit's alienation and self-exile from the Western world for the prominently different landscape precludes a direct harmonious interplay with nature, the kind of unifying integration that she reached in the desert. Kit's communication with the desert denotes a strong bond and a deep sense of harmony, which contrasts with Tunner's unsettling fruitless experience. She embodies both Port's exploratory dream and the desert's openness on infinity. She is the female Other of Port and Bowles.

[207] Bowles, *SS*, 113.

Bowles' post/colonial North Africa

> "I wanted to write a story about Morocco as I imagined it and as it seems to have been written about.... It is not a novel... It's a sort of trip through the centuries" --*Points in Time*

A large part of North Africa is Sahara and the rest is dominated by the cities and the capitals that imitate the Western metropolis. The idea, at this level, is to show how the relationship desert-city is crucial in the understanding of Bowles' literature. As one of Bowles' critics admits, "Tangier, then called the International Zone, became his home base, and North Africa his "home territory"[208]. The novels and short stories are set in Sahara and cities. In fact, Tangier and Fez are on the edge of the desert. They are an interzone between a tradition of which the desert is the utmost representative and modernity as the way in which the presence of Europe on the territory is imposed violently.

The colonial onslaught usually strips a people off their land and history through a blindly arrogant act of mapping and naming. Its first undertaking is often the initiation of the colonial appendage in the European world view and history. This pretentious inclusion or annexation not only ignores a primordial spatial and cultural identity, but also puts a European linguistic garb on its newly-configured surface. "The naming or renaming of a place," Seamus Deane contends, "the naming or renaming of a race, a region, a person, is, like all acts of primordial nomination, an act of possession". [209] The act of naming forcefully imposes a foreign linguistic vision on colonised lands. The disproportion of linguistic sign and cultural model to the colonial scene as well as the upsurge of a muffled otherness come to mock and play

[208] Stewart, *Paul*, 1974, xiii.

[209] Seamus Deane, Introduction, "Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature", (Minnesota UP), 18, quoted in Maeve Davey, '"My Bag of Paints is a Sad Museum: Colonialism, Poet and Identity in the Fiction of Anne Enright", (Open University MA, 2006), 18.

down the sham beginning of discovery. Bowles declares, "Whatever I wrote was actually part of history. I gave it flesh naturally."[210]

The theme of colonisation is present in *The Sheltering Sky*, *The Spider's House* and other short stories. With regards to biographical details, it is the most galling condition of the protagonists' North African ventures. Bowles is a twentieth-century witness of the decay of both the French Empire from the vantage point of the Moroccans who are usually depicted as marginalized and fighting back; as well as the complete transformation of North Africa that was for him the dream of an authentic space. In most of his works, he treats the colonising institution in North Africa ironically and aligns himself with the oppressed; he is reluctant to show his opinion or sentiments, and tries to use a technically observing eye. As with many exiled and embittered writers of the twentieth century, like Doris Lessing, Conrad, Forster and Greene, it was perhaps "thoughtful to dissociate [himself] from the master race".[211] The narrative voice and the protagonist of *The Spider's House* imbue the text with an anti-colonial note, yet they show at the same time the primitive human angst for violence and destruction from both colonised and coloniser's sides. James Lasdun adds

> while Bowles shares with Burroughs a connoisseur's relish for the processes of social and psychic disintegration (random violence, drugs, fevers, sexual taboo-breaking of every kind, all find their way into his stories), he seldom allows the spirit of mayhem to penetrate into the storytelling itself.[212]

The atmosphere of violence as presented by Lasdun is prevalent in Bowles' literature. In *The Spider's House*, Amar's childhood is an example of how

[210] Bowles, *Points*, 2.

[212] James Lasdun, *Paul Bowles: Stories*, (London: Penguin Books, 2000), *Short Story Criticism*, ed. Jelena O. Krstovic. Vol. 98, (Detroit: Gale, 2007), vii-xii.

natives use violence against their children in an extreme way, just as Mohammed Choukri in his autobiographical novel, *For Bread Alone*, describes how his father has beaten his brother to death. These images counterbalance the coloniser's eagerness for torture with the natives and stand for Bowles' idea of violence and terror as part of human nature. From the very beginning of the narrative, after submitting to physical and psychological violence, Amar dissociates himself from the society of his parents and the Moroccan entourage. It inevitably produces a feeling of exile and frustration for him; and so he starts to question relationships and to feel curious about the Other. By setting himself apart in space and intellectual stance, Amar parries the awkward situation of the Western settler and thinks he is "special" saying,

> A great thing in Amar's life was that he had a secret. It was a secret that did not even have to be kept secret, because no one could ever have guessed it. But he knew it and lived by it. The secret was that he was not like anybody else; he had powers that no one else possessed. Being certain of that was like having a treasure hidden somewhere out of the world's sight, and it meant much more than merely having the *baraka*.[213]

To be endowed by special powers or *Baraka*, makes Amar react in a different way to others' behaviour. His childish idea of *Baraka* allows him to take a prophet-like position in judging the coloniser, believing his prayers can influence the "after-life" destiny of the *kaffarin.* In his agony, Amar meets violence with violent ideas and wishes. The narrator adds

> Under his breath he began to invent a long prayer to Allah, asking Him to see to it that every Frenchman, before he was dragged down to Hell, which was a foregone conclusion in any case, might suffer, at the hands of the Moslems, the most exquisite torture ever devised by man. He prayed that Allah might help them discover new refinements in the matter of causing pain and

[213] Bowles, *SH*, 19.

> despair, might show them the way to the imposing of hitherto undreamed-of humiliation, degradation and agony.[214]

The encounter with the West in North African helps natives to deal with history by positioning themselves vis-à-vis the dominant Other. And so, a shabby, impoverished colonial scene makes up the North African setting of the novel. Urban and rural settlement, in a Fez caught between modernity and medievalism as two contradictory and attractive poles; it is based on a gross contradiction between a grandiloquent, self-important haste that looks up with envy, desire and loathing to a paragon Mother Country, and a hollow and degenerate reality.

In fact, the fight of nationalism is observed by Bowles as the fight against identity. *Istiqlal* members fight France the coloniser, often believing in all its culture and philosophy and using the Mother/coloniser's discourse to fight it back. In general, they left behind their own poetics while claiming their pure identity. This is how Bowles depicts it and the resounding word throughout the novel is: “lie”. A world made of lies, he says in consonance with Michael Rogers, "Nothing was what it seemed, everything had become suspect."[215] Amar, the native protagonist, has been taught that “politique”[216] is lies and that outside of Islamic law, “beyond the gates of justice lay the world of savages, Kaffarine, wild beasts.”[217]

This is what he remembers at the end of the novel when he has grown hateful towards the French Colonial power and been betrayed by the Istiqal Nationalists too. His father says: “The government and laws they might make

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[214] Bowles, *SH*, 129.

[215] Michael Rogers, “The Rolling Stone Interview”, Rolling Stone 32 (May 23rd, 1974), 33.

[216] The word is used in French even in the minds of the natives as by the eve of colonialism there was no word in Arabic coined yet to translate the French one. This shows how Bowles became a connoisseur penetrating the Desert mind and thinks as it does.

[217] Bowles, *SH*, 115.

would be nothing but a spiderweb, built to last one night-the world of politique was a world of lies..."[218] Bowles is, however, careful not to blame the Nationalists alone, but also the dedication of Colonialism as the main responsible for the destruction of the old system in Morocco. According to Bowles, old systems are vanishing and are becoming old "lies" for the sake of new ones including religion. He avers: "It's simply an evocation of that which has been lost. We'll never have it again. It's finished, it's smashed, and it's broken. We've killed God and that's the end of it. There won't ever be that again."[219]

While other twentieth century novels show the whole colonial enterprise as based on naming and historicising, Bowles rejects this violent act and adheres to the context using words, idioms, and names of local people. Naming reverberates as a glorified civilizing mission and a pompous economic advancement. Reflecting on Morocco's paradisiacal settlement, in *The Spider's House* Bowles is convinced that it has already lost its mystery and become a parody of Europe. Stenham's view is probably Bowles' on this point, that is, 'both sides were wrong' and the only people with whom he could sympathize were those who remained outside the struggle

> The Berber peasants, who merely wanted to continue with the life to which they were accustomed and whose opinion counted for nothing. They were doomed to suffer no matter who won the battle for power, since power in the last analysis meant disposal of the fruits of their labour.[220]

Within the Moroccan desert, villages, and towns, the French quarters seem to be situated in a distinguished place on their own, yet Bowles finds in the Medina his assuagement. In *The Sheltering Sky* and *The Spider's House*,

[218] Bowles, *SH*, 128.

[219] Bowles, *SH*, 202.

[220] Bowles, *SH*, 163.

Bowles represents the colonial presence ironically as odd and shallow. But North Africa is also represented as blank land that the European travellers would define on world map. Mapping in redefining the confines, building quarters and railways on the European style, and naming these colonial quarters by European names are sweeping acts that circumscribe any space into a historical vision. Paul Carter explains that "in *the act of* place-naming, space is transformed symbolically into a place, that is, a space with a history".[221] This means, also, that a "cultural place" starts to take part in history when it is given a name by a recognised historian.

The differentiation between space and place is relevant for the understanding of Bowles' relationship with North Africa. While "space," gave Bowles a sense of vastness that resists accurate definitions, after he developed a clear idea of the people North Africa becomes a clear delineated "place" with a radical reality combining both time and physical environment. As a quester for authenticity, this defining and mapping deepen his sense of alienation and displacement. This is one of the reasons Bowles' protagonist is often put in a mediating position between the native (North African) and the coloniser (the French) by being just the quester or pure aesthetics. In the heart of North Africa as "place", Bowles' characters, who quest for their identities, abide in a state of alert and frustration facing the contradictions of a space in becoming. Whether by mocking natives when they try to speak the French language or by refusing the colonial names and ways of life in the North African desert, Bowles shows the contrast between name and named, or signifier and signified, and pinpoints both the pomposity of the colonial foundation and the blind determination of the natives to follow the nationalistic movement marginalising their original qualities.

[221] Ascroft, *Postcolonial*, 377.

Ideology is present in Bowles' *The Spider's House* where the narrative of hatred and its scrutiny from minute words to violent terroristic behaviour is given a full ground in culture and religion. The discourse becomes political and anti-poetical. Bowles in the heart of religious conflicts calls all liars. As the signs manifest themselves in front of Amar he sees his belief in traditional powers crash against the belief in this world of lies

> He felt supremely deserted, exquisitely conscious of his own weakness and insignificance. His gift meant nothing; he was not even sure that he had any gift, or ever had one. The world was something different from what he had thought it. It had come nearer, but in coming nearer it had grown smaller.[222]

At this level, Bowles reveals much more about the 'loss' he predicted and feared most in his works. In one of his letters, Bowles expresses his fear of losing the authentic atmosphere of the North African desert, or what he would conceive as "that pristine state of existence we intuitively feel we once enjoyed and now have lost".[223]

It is the "concord between God and man" which Bowles epitomises in Amar and which is gradually disrupted by the Western-form of "knowledge" so that it replaces his traditional approach to life, illness, society, women and the Other through magic, enchantment, mystery, secrets, signs, maxims, "gift" or *Baraka*. His traditional veil obscures his vision of his present, modernity, the other part of the world and mainly the foreigner. His loss of two co-existing dimensions of time and space alienates him and foregrounds his limited world against the background of the infinite spiritual world of the desert. This is how a simple illiterate native would react to the Other, whether coloniser or artist. The coloniser is abhorred and fought by the native Nationalists. Yet, the French presence was everything except what its

[222] Bowles, *SH*, 378.

[223] Bowles, *Letters*, 198.

philosophy preaches about "liberté, égalité et fraternité." The colonial impingement on the North African space is satirised in the cinema/theatre scene, where cultures clash and stereotypes generated and exchanged.

The representation of French settlers deconstructs the traditional colonial structuralism of centre/margin. The last binary opposition has been maintained in most metropolitan narratives of colonialism. The French community is usually a self-contained entity posited above a degenerate native population. The clearly demarcated dichotomy between centre and margin is blurred and messed up in *The Sheltering Sky* and *The Spider's House*, mainly through the emphatic marginalisation and debasement of the French settler.[224] Bowles subverts the strongly impressed image of the dignified supervising and commanding colonialist into a beast in *The Spider's House* and sexually perverse killer in *The Sheltering Sky*.

To Bowles, the French soldiers are the "Great War" traumatic victims that exercise their own violence in the colonies. *The Spider's House* not only emblematises the deterioration of Empire, but also shows the dire monsters it created in the colonies. Psychologically, the settlement turns out to be more devastating than the regal image of wealth and cosiness the material gain could offer. Violence is a common feature for both the coloniser and the colonised. Groups of nationalists are similar to their enemy in using "lies" and "politique." Bowles' colonial North Africa is space for multiplicity, divisibility and conflict. In this setting, racial prejudice, historical hatred and antagonism are not simple headlines telling details of the binary opposition of West/East, or coloniser/colonised. Instead, there is a mosaic of separate, unbrotherly races and groups and sneaky conspiracies.

[224] Bowles, *Letters*, 213.

It is in this mixture that "Place" becomes the produce of a specific society, "social space in its instantiation".[225] Walonen argues, "this is why, for example, uninhibited wilderness spaces have such a strong capacity to produce a sense of the uncanny: their absence of customary human function produces an unsettling sense of unfamiliarity, 'the willies'."[226] This is how Walonen describes the difference between "place", as a named and defined location, and space as the "experience of situatedness". He argues,

> Place is space that is defined, that is differentiated and claimed, through the act of naming; it takes on a greater degree of social concreteness through this act, through this exercise of power and attempted control. [...] Space and place, as socially produced entities, consist of sets of prohibitions and allowances inscribed on them, of zones of differential access along lines of class, race and gender; of aesthetic codes and the ambiances they create; and of the residue of the spatial formulations of successive past social orders, among other things.[227]

The way space and place are put forward by Walonen is to be understood as the social interference in differentiating these concepts. Society or man recreates space by imposing "codes" for life, by the perception and artistic reproduction of it. Space is a social product and the foreigner/outsider should adhere to the "codes", "translating" them into his/her own understanding. Bowles is the "outsider" whose translation of a "dominant image" echoes Paul Ricoeur's idea of "the Utopian", in the sense of a cherished idealized "social order" based on "absolute equality", qualities of difference "such as the exotic". Bowles' North Africa is an area for wars; coloniser versus colonised; the United States of America Vs communism; tradition Vs modernisation; authenticity Vs imitation, time Vs timelessness. His view of

[225] Michael K. Walonen, "Sense of Place in the North African Writings of Paul Bowles", in *On and Off the Page: Mapping Place in Text and Culture*, ed. M.B. Hackler (Cambridge, 2009), 9.

[226] Walonen, Sense, 14.

[227] Walonen, Sense, 14-5.

the region "as a kind of frontier space open to new kinds of possibility" constitutes the alternative to another rigidly settled order of "mid-century America with its paranoia and its antipathy to all deviations from conventional behaviour."[228] Bowles expressed his anxiety for the space under a process of radical transformation of which he is witness. His disdain to the changing space marks his loss of his own "Utopia".

For Bowles North Africa is the alternative to a whole Western discourse of progress in which no individual is safe from its swallowing machinery. His American protagonists undergo a process of identity loss and recovery. Walonen declares

> Unlike later works such as *The Spider's House*, *The Sheltering Sky* can be appreciated without much understanding of the Maghreb, and its existential themes and poetesque sense of horror make for an easier placement within the Western literary cannon.[229]

In *The Sheltering Sky*, the Maghreb has already begun to change. Yet, Western elements were like stains on the canvas. The narrator says "[T]here each innovation of Europe was merely one more squalid touch."[230] Port and Kit's trip from Oran towards the Algerian Sahara marks their escape from the anxiety of mid-century American ethics towards an open space that is depicted as "an immense liberatory potential,"[231] according to Walonen, but "this vastness and radical alterity of the Sahara [...] the real protagonist of the novel, overwhelms both Port and Kit."[232] Indeed Kit becomes the Sahara physically, wandering without an aim except living, living instinctively,

[228] Walonen, Sense, 17.

[229] *The Sheltering Sky* was numbered among the greatest English-language novels of the twentieth century by both Modern Library and Time Magazine.

[230] Bowles, *SS*, 19.

[231] Walonen, Sense, 18.

[232] Walonen, Sense, 18.

reduced to its minimal sense without using the brain, for the mind is the emblem of culture and the social codes and impediments. In the meantime, Port dies of typhoid and dissolves physically to mingle with the dust and hold the sheltering sky:

> His cry went on through the final image: the spots of raw bright blood on the earth. Blood on excrement. The supreme moment, high above the desert, when the two elements, blood and excrement, long kept apart merge. A black star appears a point of darkness in the night sky's clarity. Point of darkness and gateway to repose. Reach out, pierce the fine fabric of the sheltering sky, take repose. [233]

In fact the desert most desired by Bowles as openness and a freeing space is seen by Kit and Port by its stimulation of "horror and loathing in them [...] to upset their senses of self."[234]

Arriving at their hotel in Ain Krorfa they find a fountain filled with rotting garbage, sore-infested infants crawling about unattended, and "hairless dogs ravaged by flies and the sun."[235] Earlier, on the train to Boussif, Kit accidentally gets trapped in the fourth-class compartment and confronts a man holding a blood-dripping sheep's head and a leprous missing his nose.[236] On other occasions Kit and Port encounter an Arab man shaving his pubic hair,[237] an incestuous British mother and her son,[238] and a cockroach that has been impaled by a hotel cook.[239]

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[233] Bowles, *SS*, 91.

[234] Bowles, *SS*, 85.

[235] Bowles, *SS*, 86.

[236] Bowles, *SS*, 63-64.

[237] Bowles, *SS*, 76.

[238] Bowles, *SS*, 103.

[239] Bowles, *SS*, 111

In fact *The Sheltering Sky* is unlike the rest of Bowles' texts for it is centred on the Western presence and reaction to the North African desert. One may think that, like the post/colonial novels of Lessing, Conrad and Forster, the natives are mere items and rectified elements in the Westerner's exploratory mission. Except for a few names, the natives are usually voiceless, shadowy silhouettes that perform no action worth noting in the narrative. In *The Sheltering Sky*, the natives are given names and Bowles, unlike other English writers of the period, gives his characters speech to express their opinions and dreams (Marhnia's discourse is a good example). Later, in *The Spider's House*, the novel is mainly focalised on the encounter between Stenham (the American) and Amar (the Moroccan). The novel is divided into chapters dealing separately with the lives and ideas of these main characters though they share the position of the main character of the novel.

Yet within the threshold of the narration characters like the English woman in *The Sheltering Sky* and the English painter in *The Spider's House* stand for the phobic Arab opinion in Bowles' literature - Bowles through these characters stresses this sense of bane and alienation that exacerbates the Westerner's uneasiness in the North African environment (see characterization). *The Sheltering Sky* marks the beginning of Bowles' successful career while *The Spider's House* is one of his last novels before he dedicates himself to translating native folk tales. Progressively the voice to the natives retreats into the role of a linguistic mediator. Is this not an excellent example of how Bowles in his anti-colonial maturational process created space and voice to those who were before him silent, bustling, gross eyesore servants and farmhands! The voice the Natives are given in *The Sheltering Sky* fits perfectly the novel's background of the artistic/aesthetic quest for the authentic in the North African desert. The young woman's discourse may be seen as a clairvoyant discourse, reading in the protagonists'

mind and given flesh and words to his inner dreams. She shares his dreams and becomes like a tourist guide showing Port his way into the desert or a prophetic voice coming to his mind whenever he moves from one place to the other. She is always associated with his understanding of the space of culture, the human.

> The unpleasant tension inside him was lessening; he felt very much awake. The bar was stuffy and melancholy. It was full of the sadness inherent in all deracinated things [...] he thought, "how many more moments of happiness have been lived through, here?" The happiness if there still was any, existed elsewhere: in sequestered rooms that looked onto bright alleys where the cats gnawed fish heads in shaded cafes hung with reed matting, where the hashish smoke mingled itself with the fumes of mint from the hot tea; down on the docks, out at the edge of the sebkha in the tents (he passed over the white image of Marhnia, the placid face), beyond the mountains of the great Sahara, in the endless regions that were all of Africa. But not here in this sad colonial room where each invocation of Europe was merely one more squalid touch, one more visible proof of isolation.[240]

> They had left the town, traversed the valley, and were climbing a large, bare hill on the other side. [...] Under the wall, scattered about on the yellow earth, were several tiny black tents; which one he had been in, which one was Marhnia's [...]. Again and again the valley came into view, always a little smaller, a little farther away, a little less real.[241]

Port's relationship to the desert comes true through his physical contact with its people and culture. Showing the dreams with the three girls of Marhnia's tale is one aspect of Bowles giving space for the natives to speak. On other occasions they speak French and try to deal with Port, whose equivalent in *The Spider's House* Stenham speaks Arabic and speaks to Amar, the other protagonist of the novel. Amar represents Bowles' mature understanding of

[240] Bowles, *SS*, 19.

[241] Bowles, *SS*, 26.

North Africa and so he completes our reading of the space/man controversy in the twentieth-century North African desert. Patrick Evans, a critic of Bowles, confirms this idea:

> What [the] critical response ignores is the vigor of the native life that is so central to Bowles's writing; his apathetic Europeans and Americans make a telling contrast to his vision of authenticity. [...] His third novel, *The Spider's House*, is probably more successful than the first two because it gives considerable weight to such a native - Amar, the Moroccan youth who shares the story with a couple of Americans. Details and rituals of native life come into the foreground and the novel is given a liveliness and color that are rather lacking in the others [...]. More satisfying are Bowles's recent translations of stories told by pre-literature Moroccan storytellers, in which the patterns of native life are once more dominant.[242]

The idea of a shared protagonism between Western and North African characters is of utmost importance. Amar is perceived as the inner dream of Stanham as Lee concludes that his attraction to the native boy is based on the fact that Amar appears to him uncontaminated by time and the "new" both the coloniser and Istiqlal bring along and just throw on an unprepared country: "To him he was a consolation, a living proof that today's triumph was not yet total; he personified Stenham's infantile hope that time might still be halted and man sent back to his origins." [243]

It is in this way that Bowles gives speech to his native characters to speak their space and depict their landscapes from their own point of view. The House in *The Spider's House* is endlessly woven, renewed, reconstructed, never complete or definite, never a fixed ground. Patteson concludes: "There is no permanent shelter. Completeness or closure. We continue to weave and

[242] Patrick Evans, "Paul Bowles: Overview", in *Reference guide to American Literature*, ed. Jim Kamp (Detroit: St James Press, 1994), 2.

[243] Bowles, *SH*, 345.

reweave, to build and rebuild, in an unceasing effort to shield ourselves from what Amar faces at the end of *The Spiders House*: a vanished home, an empty road and a terrible vacant sky."[244]

Paul Bowles depicts in his *The Sheltering Sky* and *The Spider's House* a worldwide phenomenon of decolonisation and the concomitant change of the North African space. He also voices the century's distress for the future of a violent warring human collectivity. The titles of his novels hint at the hapless situation of his century's generations. His characters are people without a sheltering sky or a solid home, just creatures in a war-ridden world, whose strange rationale is always beyond their grasp. Mainly in *The Spider's House*, the textualisation of history and ideology as an important feature of the novelistic flow completes the aesthetic quest into the North African desert in *The Sheltering Sky*. While to show the inevitability of the historical ingredient, they give the critic a meticulous portrait of a violently vanishing civilization.

Stenham and Polly, by leaving Amar behind homeless and lost, mimic the coloniser who left the whole place in disorder in a mid-way between the desert and the West. The medieval is lost for ever and so is identity. The Orient is no longer Orient, but a West dislocated and distorted for ever delving in the desert in the background and the shade of Europe.

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[244] Richard Patteson, "The External World of Paul Bowles", Perspectives on Contemporary Literature 10 (1984), <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA17156449&v=2.1&u=wash89460&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=>, in Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism. Vol. 209 (Detroit: Gale, 2009), (11 May 2012), 16-22.

The historical ideological cosmos

Bowles' recurrent change of narrative technique and the mixture of genres in his novels make it difficult for the literary critic, to pigeonhole the whole narrative substance and tabulate it under a single heading. While he seems to write in an overall realistic vein, his stories resemble, to a certain extent, his autobiography. Bowles' quest in *The Sheltering Sky* is, in some measure, existential and romantic; in *The Spider's House* it is perhaps more realistic, political, and ideological. His last works shift his position from a writer to a translator of native North Africans. However, to transfer oral tales into written fiction modelling them after Western narrative techniques puts him in an intermediate position between translator and writer. *The Sheltering Sky* and *The Spider's House* have many realistic elements, mainly the second. His approach remains particular in that

> Stylistically, Bowles favours a kind of neutral transparency over the more personally expressive or richly textured idioms of many of his contemporaries. The effort is oddly heightening, giving the stories an almost physical, incontrovertible, object-like reality, with the words merely acting as a window onto the events they contain. At times they read almost like translation.[245]

This tradition brought about a critical, rather contentious literary mood. Realism studies Man in his group relations and often depicts his alienation in an unfathomable world. A Lukacsian understanding of reality would dictate that "a realistic world is a complex, comprehensive set of relations between man, nature and history."[246] Bowles in *The Spider's House* and *The Sheltering Sky* adopts this view and depicts the individual interaction with natural and

[245] Lasdun, *Paul,* x.

[246] Eagleton, *Marxism,* 28.

social surroundings within an impersonal historical process. The narrative mediates the modern individual harassment with a sense of estrangement and powerlessness in the face of the likely unfathomable impersonality of the historical current. The realistic treatment of Bowles' novel echoes Lukacs' "eulogy of realism," as the best narrative vein that would capture human life in a panoramic representation.

Lukacs merges this theory with the Marxist creed of literary commitment and political militancy. He believes that the novel should participate in the struggle against capitalism: "Great art combats the alienation and fragmentation of capitalist society, projecting a rich many-sided image of wholeness".[247] In this theoretical context, Bowles' novels represent a thorough depiction of the colonial North African space and society in the sunset of capitalist military presence and the dawn of capitalist cultural hegemony. "Bowles' travel writing carries a pretense to reality and record that his fiction need not be burdened by."[248] Working within the realist tradition, Bowles shows a thorough understanding of the historical forces that drive his age, with an acute novelistic vision that can glean the historical fragments and shape them into a unique portrayal of the North African space. In *The Spider's House*, he uses characterization as a powerful, deeply suggestive narrative unit: his characters achieve the Lukacsian dictum of "typicality." Most of the personae are "typical" in the sense that they embody a collective set of representative traits, which the reader would associate with the age and the historical circumstances. "A "typical" or "representative" character incarnates the historical forces without thereby ceasing to be richly individualized."[249] Bowles' embodiment of these ideas by the characters in

[247] Eagleton, *Marxism,* 31.

[248] Ian Almond, "Experimenting with Islam: Nietzschean Reflections of Bowles' Araplaina", *Short Story Criticism*, ed. Jelena O. Krstovic, vol. 98, (Detroit: Gale, 2007), 320.

[249] Eagleton, *Marxism,* 29.

The Spider's House is completely different from those in *The Sheltering Sky*, where "he may not be a human portraitist, he has, like some film-makers, created characters from scenery. Deserts, jungles, city streets are personages in his books as in his life."[250] The English characters like Mrs Lyles in *The Sheltering Sky* or Mr Moss in *The Spider's House*, for instance, incarnate the personality of the colonial figures. She idealises the English colonial society, while she ironically represents the degenerate in the novel. She is often depicted as snobbish, racist, believing obsessively in white British supremacy and as a haughtily class conscious woman.

The multi-racialism of the North African space is another historical stream that Bowles seeks to delimit and depict. The sympathetic eyes of the Jewish shopkeeper, Daoud Zozeph, for instance, "made [Kit] aware for the first time of how cruelly lacking in that sentiment was the human landscape here, and how acutely she had been missing it."[251] The Berbers are the other "natives" in Bowles' fiction, participating in the stories by their betrayal to the Arabs, when fighting the French in the scene when Stenham, Polly and Amar were stuck in the bar in *The Spider's House*.

The use of characterisation, as a rich medium to transmit ideas and historical truths, is dexterously handled by Bowles through the realist vein in *The Spider's House*. The historical event, in its crude historicity, is narrated and mediated through characterization that enlivens simple chronology and stale citation. The escape of Kenzie during the War of Independence, for instance, elicits both the historical event and the ideological debate; the same as the death of the Arab girl in *The Sheltering Sky* that triggers hatred among the natives. The mutterings of the petty colonialists and their reaction to the "old"

[250] Gary Kutchar, "Typology and the Language of Concern in the Work of Northrop Frye", *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne le Littérature comparée,* vol. 27, (March-June 2000), 160.

[251] Bowles, *SS*, 220.

and “child” natives as a way to punish the nationalists show the savagery of the “civilised” Westerner. The same savagery is met by Amar’s father’s punishment, the wrestle between Amar and Mohammed, and the way women and the Jews are persecuted and even killed for any mistake they may commit; all to account for the savagery from the native side as well. It is in this way that Bowles theorizes about violence.

Such moments of violence are persistent in Bowles. The severing of the Professor's tongue in "A Distant Episode" is an instance that stands for pure violence for which the reader can find no reason. Many critics explained Bowles' extreme violence and sadism in scenes such as bathing in blood, strangulation, group rape, forced sodomy, fights, either as an attempt to carry on with the tradition Poe had founded,[252] by the novelist's eagerness to settling "a landscape of nightmare.[253] John Aldridge claims that the desert “setting” generates “an atmosphere of violence” which is a hyperbolised background against which characters’ “bizarre actions” become less foregrounded; and so,

> The Arab world with its filth, disease, and poverty is an innately destructive world dominated by an ancient spirit of evil. Because of its mixture of races, creeds, and castes, it has no fixed center of moral or religious law. It becomes, therefore, the perfect external equivalent of the spiritual emptiness and moral anarchy of the Moresbys and, through them, of all modern civilization.[254]

Aldridge misrepresents the place Bowles adored in his life and eternalises its authenticity in his fiction. If Bowles condemned any act of violence at all, it was to chastise human nature in general. To Bowles, “Violence! Sweet

[252] William Peden, *The American Short Story*, (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1964), 119.

[253] Aldridge, *Paul*, 188.

[254] Aldridge, *Paul*, 188.

violence!" takes the full space of home. Furthermore, Ian Almond explains violence as the end for the one who leaves "home" or the place of peace and Christian moral bliss. Almond declares,

> The cruelty we so often find in Bowles constitutes a perceived flight from the just, kind, democratic world of Christian humanism. The senseless cruelty and violence is there to remind us we are not "at home."[255]

The idea of senseless violence is enhanced by Bowles' short story of the cursed linguist, in "A Distant Episode," who "loses his tongue before he loses his mind and his humanity" and reduces his status to a captive in the Sahara. The majority of Bowles' stories expose protagonists to unexplained violence, which often ends by taking away their lives. Almond adds that "the dream-like brutality of Bowles' imagination, which evokes horror far more persuasive than anything in Poe, or in Gide"[256] is the most recurrent motif in his novels. Perhaps violence invites our heroes to go home blaming the desert as space and culture for their misfortunes. Even by violence, the writer avoids linguistic traps that reveal only one sense. The reader "is usually outside Bowles' characters," and needs a plethora of meanings and interpretations. It is in the profusion of readings that Bowles' literature excels. In Bowles, violence works as one of the novelist's visions of reality. In this prospect, L. Moffitt Cecil adds

> Although in *The Sheltering Sky* Paul Bowles makes no direct mention of *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*, it is inevitable that a reader should consider the story as an Arabian tale. The North African setting, the travel adventure motif, and certain richly suggestive scenes and incidents force the comparison. Beneath or beyond the somewhat shabby tourist world of

[255] Almond, Experimenting, 312

[256] Almond, Experimenting, 312-3.

> North Africa lies a world of violence and enchantment. At times the course of the narrative brings Port and Kit into this forbidden realm.[257]

The "fictive" treatment"[258] of such events as the nationalist movement or the King's jail depends on characterization as a narrative mode of inclusion or insertion, to use Eagleton's terminology. But writers make as much use of the stylistic devices which distance the historical ingredient by dint of which the text cuts off any direct interplay with the historical real. Studying the ideological presence of history in the text, Terry Eagleton argues that the literary text is a free kind of discourse when compared with historiography, since the historical "real" is not what constitutes its object of denotation, and that this *distantiation* of history, this absence of any particular historical "real", which confers on literature its air of freedom. […]. The text, we may say, gives us certain socially determined representations of the real cut loose from any particular real conditions to which those representations refer."[259] Indeed, the reader of Bowles' novels notices the shift from an existentialist style in *The Sheltering Sky* to a more politically inspired kind of literature in *The Spider's House*.

While *The Sheltering Sky* is less ideological than existential, *The Spider's House*, as a political novel sequence throughout much of its thematic concerns, mediates a panoramic view of the ideological conflicts of its times. The novel abounds in ideological challenges by deploying a large textual space for the experimentation on an alternative vision based on the emancipating creed in authenticity. Bowles sheds light on the aspects of old Morocco or the desert that Campbell enhances with his belief "Morocco is a

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[257] Cecil Moffitt, *Paul Bowles' Sheltering Sky and Arabia*, Research Studies 42.1, Mar., Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol. 209,(Detroit: Gale: 1974), 44-49.

[258] Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*, (London and New York: Verso, 1995), 70.

[259] Eagleton, *Criticism,* 74.

world full of possibilities, a magical place where the constraints of rigid thought disappeared."[260] Morocco is perceived as a space of freedom by both Campbell and Bowles. This latter admires the parallel explanations of phenomena through sorcery, jinns etc. Morocco is the alternative way to life that gives free rein to Bowles' quest for individualism.

The texture of *The Spider's House* tale turns out to be a porous space that permeates various extra-textual ingredients, namely the impalpable life substance of ideology. Although *The Spider's House* is a political text where each main character stands for a specific ideology and in his view of literature as a committed kind of discourse that must participate in the militant liberating current that drives social conflicts, Bowles lays bare both the workings of colonial ideology as well as the nationalist one. He goes deeper than merely liberating the North African land from the conqueror, by refusing the nationalist aim of taking the *patria* in hand and leading it to the Western concept of Reason. The narrator declares Moss is "really very pro-French," in that he refuses to consider "the Moroccans' present culture, however decadent, an established fact, an existing thing. Instead, he seemed to believe that it was something accidentally left over from bygone centuries, now in a necessary state of transition, that the people needed temporary guidance in order to progress to some better condition, 'so that,' Stenham had bitterly remarked, 'they can stop being Moroccans'." For Stenham the French have the same idea as the Nationalists; "they quarrelled only over externals, and even there he was beginning to wonder if these supposed disagreements were not part of a gigantic Machiavellian act, put on under the combined auspices of the French and Moroccan Communists in governmental positions."[261] The

[260] Neil Campbell*, The Unfinished Scream: The Disintegration of the Self and Society in the Works of Paul Bowles. PhD dissertation.* (The University College of Wales, 1987), 302.

[261] Bowles, *SH*, 155.

western protagonist is critical of the ways religion-based traditionalists and French-oriented nationalists think of Morocco.

Defining "being in knowing" as an advocacy of the Western modern belief in Reason, Moss is the voice of the European project to globalise the world in the novel. Stenham continues to wonder whether Moss is right, the "key question, it seemed to him, was that of whether man was to obey Nature, or attempt to command her. It had been answered long, long ago, claimed Moss; man's very essence lay in the fact that he had elected to command." To Stenham, "wisdom consisted in the conscious and joyous obedience to natural laws," the reaction of Moss is: "My dear man, wisdom is a primitive concept," he had told him. "What we want is knowledge."[262] The western protagonist continues to map the ideas and to react to them. The next is While Moss, who is pro-French in his battle for reason and command; Kenzie, on the other hand, expresses a different opinion, adopting the Nationalist tone. He confesses to Molly: "'Interesting things would be happening in the not-too-distant future,' Kenzie promised. […]. For Kenzie was making it very clear that he sided wholly with the Moroccans."[263] Since the debate takes place between completely different Western opinions, Stenham often voices Bowles' views of the region. To the narrator, imperialism, nationalism, and patriarchal socialism are all just ideologies that act like the capitalist ideal of work and progress, and are to be avoided as he avoided them in life and fiction. To Bowles' thinkers, Stenham and Port, those ideologies are inter-penetrable and tend to echo each other in changing people from their guiding beliefs into other new governing law. In some measure, they are all laws.

[262] Bowles, *SH*, 156.

[263] Bowles, *SH*, 167.

This intricacy is best illustrated by natives: Mohammed and the group of boys in the café, especially in the scene when nationalists come to give orders to people and spy on the feasts, hold a social ordeal designated as an internal colonisation, as Kate Millett would describe it. This concept relates the nationalist oppression to the colonial and Western oppression. It sets up a parallel between the kind of subjugation and marginalisation of the North African space and the belittlement of the colonised. This is echoed by Molly, as Stenham "watched her" and sees how she considers Moroccans as "backward onlookers standing on the side lines of the parade of progress; they must be exhorted to join, if necessary pulled by force into the march." He compares her attitude to "the missionary," and adds, "but whereas the missionary offered a complete if unusable code of thought and behaviour, the modernizer offered nothing at all, save a place in the ranks."[264] For him, the natives "who with their blind intuitive wisdom had triumphantly withstood the missionaries' cajoleries, now were going to be duped into joining the senseless march of universal brotherhood; […]. The new world would be a triumph of frustration, where all humanity would be lifting itself by its own bootstraps – the equality of the damned."[265]

In Bowles, oppression reaches *the* small unit of society: the family. Both Port and Stenham are against the idea of the family as a conventional status. Though many critics contribute to a patriarchal reading of Port/Kit relationship, in Bowles' life marriage was based on affection and companionship rather than laws and moral duties. Stenham has an affair with the married Lee, Port with another woman apart from Kit. In his writing, Bowles tends to make no difference between men and women in that he uses male and female protagonists, travellers, writers, journalists. Kate Millett was

[264] Bowles, *SH*, 252.

[265] Bowles, *SH*, 252.

amongst the first feminist theoreticians to perceive the political essence of the relationship between the woman and the patriarch within the family unit. What is interesting for the present analysis is Millett's contention "the personal is political". She vehemently rejects any demarcation between the domestic spheres in which woman is locked and the public sphere from which she is excluded. Women suffer from a diffused kind of colonisation or oppression that operates on the level of the microcosmic family. The family unit perpetuates the social oppression exerted by a patriarchal socialism upon the sub-section of the female society. This is what Bowles highlights in *The Sheltering Sky* and *The Spider's House*. In the first novel, the narrator explores the land and body of the native women. At the same time, Marhnia transmits a story within the story of Port and Kit, sharing their dream of authenticity by her oral tale. Kit becomes the protagonist in the third book embodying the desert, endorsing Port's dream and masking herself to become the hybrid woman in male Tuareg attires. In *The Spider's House*, the natives including the illiterate Amar have problems in dealing with women as their immediate Other. Amar observes Stenham and Lee:

> Now Amar looked closely at the man, decided he was not French, and felt the wave of hatred that has been on its way recede, leaving a residue of disappointment and indifference tinged with curiosity. […]. A little later he looked back at them. They were talking together in a low voice and smiling at each other. The woman was *obviously* a prostitute of the lowest order, because her arms and shoulders were completely uncovered, and the dress she wore had been cut shockingly low in the neck.[266]

The described scene is perhaps identical to Amar's naked look to Lee. It is Bowles' imaginative understanding of how a North African boy of the 1950s would see a European woman. Amar's "scrutiny" translates a whole set of

[266] Bowles, *SH*, 137, [my italics].

cultural dogmas and prejudices. Another instance in *The Spider's House* that shows the North African space as the executive sphere that thoroughly subjects the woman to the dictates of patriarchal socialism or, to use the Foucauldian terminology, the micro-political unit that serves the ends of the diffused authority, occurs in what Abdelmjid (a waiter in Stenham's hotel) says of the Jew,

> "If we catch a Jew alone in the street at night now, we treat him like a Muslim woman," Abdelmejid had said one morning when he came to get the breakfast tray.
>
> "What do you mean?" Stenham had asked him; he expected a shocking revelation, a new, lurid sidelight on the socio-sexual deportment of the Moroccans.
>
> "Why, we throw stones at him until he falls down. Then we throw more stones and kick him."
>
> "But surely you don't do that to Moslem women," Stenham protested […]
>
> "Of course we do!"Abdelmajid replied, surprised that the Christain should not be acquainted with such a basic tenet of public behaviour. "Always," he added firmly.[267]

Stenham interviews the native and remains upset by such a confession of hatred to women and Jews. The narrator shows the grain of violence deeply rooted in the Moroccan life and balances between the one of coloniser and colonised. The discussion of this oppressive apparatus of power, called by Millett "sexual politics", was extended by Sandra Gilbert in her essay "What Do Feminist Critics Want: A Postcard from the Volcano", into "sexual politics", trying to designate the kind of literary exclusion which hampered women writers. "Every text can be seen as in some sense a political gesture and more

[267] Bowles, *SH*, 198-9.

specifically as a gesture determined by a complex of assumptions about male-female relations, assumptions we might call sexual poetics".[268]

The words of Gilbert speak of representation as misrepresentation when it comes from the headquarters of hegemony.[269] The stereotypical representation of women in literature and discourse and its perpetuation in real life by a male writer gives no room for the subjects to speak. Yet in *The Sheltering Sky* and *The Spider's House*, Bowles gives space for natives and women to speak their minds as he did in life with his wife. In *The Spider's House*, the protagonist is puzzled by the misrepresentations of a whole tradition of misogeny. With Lee and Kit, Bowles offers answers to the would-be feminist query of Jane. These female characters are perhaps her fictional counterparts in their quest for identity. He offers space to the twentieth century women's accurate and representative reflection of themselves in literature, since her "male" tradition is pervaded by an indomitable patriarchal vision that locks the woman into those reductionist images and vilifying stereotypes.

Another instance of the patriarchal disdain of women's humanity is shown when Amar and Stenham talk about turning to the hotel. While Stenham says "the lady wants to go to the hotel", the boys "laughed, as though Lee's desires were those of an unreasoning animal and were to be taken no more seriously."[270] In another scene they exchange the following dialogue:

> Amar looked up at him.

[268] Sandra Gilbert, "What Do Feminist Critics Want? A Postcard from the Volcano", in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (London: Virago Press, 1989), 31.

[269] Brantlinger, Class, 110.

[270] Bowles, *SH*, 259.

> "Why do you talk so much with that woman?' he said, the expression of his voice a mixture of shyness and curiosity. "Words are for people, not for women."
>
> The man laughed. "Aren't women people?" he asked.
>
> "People are people," Amar said. "Women are women. It is not the same thing."
>
> The man looked very surprised, and laughed more loudly. Then his voice became serious, he leaned in the chair.[271]

The narrator's formulated image of women in the North African space echoes a correspondent one in a social tradition that reverberates and alleges the patriarchal society's fixation of women into stereotypical roles and images. These female stereotypes stem basically from essentialist theories about female nature. This discursive oppression is what would generate a woman's counter-discourse, which would initially strive for the establishment of a new framework and a new system of representation that would take in such an "anomaly" as the free female selfhood. While exposing the ideological foundations of the literary masculinist canon, Bowles seems to herald and anticipate his own contribution to the nascent female literary tradition and its subversive potential.

The recent critical discussion on the analogy between the internal colonisation of women and the colonial subjugation of natives serves to point the intricacy of the Western ideology of race gender. The narratives of *The Spider's House* are especially derisive of those two underlying ideologies. Bowles shows that violence, as a colonial attitude, is also the natives' attitude, which repeats the clichés used to colonise people. "As far as I can see", Bowles declares, in *Paris Review*, "people from all corners of the earth have an

[271] Bowles, *SH*, 276-7.

unlimited potential for violence."[272] In fact, the representation of the colonial discourse in *The Sheltering Sky* and *The Spider's House* is pervaded by a sense of boredom and absurdity in the beginning of Bowles' career as a novelist. Then maturing, his theories for violence explain the phenomenon as innate and natural. So, if the Western is perceived as coloniser by the natives, the native is sexist in the Western culture. But Bowles does not try to approve colonisation, nor does he justify it. He repeatedly exposes colonial stereotypes about natives as groundless views and unaccountable behaviour. They are derisively rejected by an ever rebellious Bowles as naïve, meaningless notions.

Challenging a colonial stereotype of the underdeveloped, uncivilized natives, Stenham, for instance, insists on participating in the traditional feasts and rites of the natives, sleeping on the bar floor, drinking their tea continuously and trying to live their lives. He feels safe in what is stereotyped as dangerous. He thus plays down not only the myth of racial assault, but also the whole ideology of white racial supremacy. In *The Sheltering Sky*, in another instance, the French lieutenant kills a native girl by mistake and he tries to dismiss the terrible act as a degrading issue since it shows most blatantly the dire consequences of colonialism and racist attitudes.

Apart from those sparse examples, which illustrate the narrative's challenge of sexist and colonialist ideologies, Bowles represents the oppositional ideology, namely socialism. A retrospective vision of this ideology in *The Spider's House* gives an ironical tone to its representation. Many critics, like Neil Campbell, allege that the novel presents the desert with the taste, portrayal, texture and effect of the time and that although Bowles "writes from a sensibility that is foreign [to] [...] the American ordinary - a sensibility

[272] Prose, Spider's, 61.

that identifies with nature, natural forces, and spirit of place, he does not deny its overall dangerous atmosphere of lunacy. A little sentence he had once read came into his head ... save himself."[273] The last part of the book presents an exchange of accusations between Lee and Stenham. It exposes the disparity between communists of the high-flown intellectualism of the theoretical body of the doctrine and the interpretation of those who undertake to uphold it. Lee is the example of women who follow communism to be free and flee patriarchal oppression and the prison house of matrimony. She is obsessive about the slightest action that a man makes and it triggers her anti-sexist attitude. The *Istiqlal* or Moroccan nationalists are the "intellectuals" at European universities who, according to Stenham, are more destructive to their own culture than the colonialists.

The idea that socialism fails to assimilate, represent and emancipate such oppressed groups as women and natives is plainly suggested in the narrative. This is exposed as one of the lacunae of an emancipatory doctrine that aspires to establish worldwide brotherhood and egalitarianism. The episode that describes Lee's social quandary when she gives money to Amar to buy a revolver, careless of his childhood, of his ignorance, shows her lack of reason and her rather childish behaviour. Communism is represented in *The Spider's House* as a failure in taking in such injustice. The nationalists are against the French colonialists, against the native's passivity and against the foreigners' silence or indifference to the late happenings.

Bowles' narrative adventure undertakes a comprehensive depiction of the historical atmosphere of the twentieth-century North African desert. The stories are firmly rooted in their times since the fictional events are closely related to the historical epoch that inscribes or gives rise to them. The

[273] Bowles, *SH*, 343-4.

protagonists epitomise the individual dilemma of this specific space and their particular historical era, as the narrator recounts his lifelong struggle against the inscrutable forces of nature, society and history. The ideological debate, which flares up through the narrative, centres upon the strife of the individual against violence. Hassan Ihab comments:

> In this quest lies the appeal of the primitive, which seems to promise an order in which such an idea can thrive. The primitive in *The Sheltering Sky*, however, is an order which proves too complex for the Westerner to penetrate. […]. Given the violence internalized by the self during its childhood acculturation, the absence of a restraining social fabric only allows the self to be […] the victim of its own internal warfare.[274]

According to Hassan Ihab, violence is as much inside the quester as in the space where the quest takes place. In fact, he makes the difference between the two aspects of violence through the word "primitive." The primitiveness of the desert is obstacle to the Westerners' logic and civilisation. Nevertheless, the social oppression, the ideological oppression, the historical oppression and the psychological oppression make up for the violence perceived in the North African space and set against the desert as liberating, pure and authentic to the quester who searches for a space without metaphor and a state of absolute solitude.

Bowles' quest for his own utopia in North Africa goes hand in hand with the quest for home and identity and somehow the two realms are confused and overlap in the writer's imagination. Both are, however, abandoned at the end when the protagonist reaches the shaky ground of his dismantled identity. Morocco becomes one of the "homes" in the writer's mental map. In a parallel way, the Western narrator in his novels and short stories retreats to give the narrative voice for natives while he becomes an interpreter, a witness and a

[274] Hassan, *Rumors*, 42.

translator. The desertion of the hellish atmosphere of the rigid modern New York of the 50s in search of a stable home in a “medieval” North Africa of the post-world war and in its struggle for independence turns out to be a fatal movement towards further violence, instability and dissatisfaction.

I have so far studied the concept of space from different conjunctions. The vicissitudes of this quest are complex relations of space, identity, history and ideology. However precarious the journey is, Bowles clings to a limpid realist vision in the narrative accounts of the North African desert. In the last stories and travel accounts of the journey an overall haziness settles upon the narrative voice. A concomitant turgidity of style and vision accompanies the change of the narrative point of view.

Conclusion: the authentic space in Bowles' translations

> "There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated . . . Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsions places the one haunted by it literally beside himself."
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> - Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*.

> "[Translation,] like all (re)writings is never innocent."
>
> - Susan Bassnett, *Translation, History and Culture*.

This conclusive part of the present study examines how Bowles' translations of Moroccan oral stories are expressive of his main interest in authenticity, and scrutinizes the important questions of Bowles' authority, the narrative hybridity as a mirror to the role of the storytellers, the binary writer/translator, and the representation of the desert of the twentieth century Maghreb.

In one of his interviews, Bowles tells a journalist that his protagonists are different faces of the Professor in "A Distant Episode," the short story that becomes the title of one of the writer's later books. Bowles' life quest in the North African space and literature brings into prominence the theme of encounters between Western and native cultures. As the Professor, Paul Bowles chose the Maghreb and focused his writings on its desert. He experienced the place in its authentic state and tried to depict it in his texts. In the beginning, Bowles carried on the Western tradition of writing the

Orient from a Eurocentric position by showing the horror of the desert on "us". In his earlier works of fiction, such as *The Sheltering Sky*, our main concern in previous analyses, and *Let It Come Down*, one explores the Maghreb from the perspective of the Western characters'. In his early and most successful works, he affiliates with other English writers on the "Arabian" desert, mainly Charles M. Doughty and T. E. Lawrence. Rania Kabbani, in her *Europe's Myth of the Orient*, traces the possible common features of Western voyagers in the Middle East as a space of possibilities:

> Europe was charmed by an Orient that shimmered with possibilities that promised a sexual space from the dictates of the bourgeois morality of the metropolis. The European reacted to the encounter as a man might react to a woman, by manifesting strong attraction or strong repulsion. E. W. Lane described his first sight of Egypt, the Egypt he had dreamed of since boyhood, thus: "as I approached the shore, I felt like an eastern bridegroom, about to lift the veil of his bride".[275]

Bowles had in common with Thesiger his famous tributes or "memorial to a vanished past, a tribute to a once magnificent people."[276] As they embarked on a trip against the Western time and space dimensions, Bowles asserts that

> Here the population has not yet been attacked by the deadly virus which sends the victim to the nearest flea-market to purchase second-hand European or American trousers and shoes, in order to flaunt them before his less enlightened neighbor ... the renunciation of native clothing is merely a symbol for the rejection of the entire indigenous culture.[277]

These Western travelogues searched for an alternative to their highly modernised cities in a place where it was still possible to imagine a philistine state of being. Bowles' noble project conceived, "Morocco [as] a fight against

[275] Kabbani, *Europe's,* 67.

[276] Kabbani, *Europe's,* 67.

[277] Bowles, *Yallah*, 17.

time and the deculturising activities of political enthusiasts."[278] It was an act to establish a bridge to immerse himself in a time of innocence, when man still felt a more magical link with the roots of his culture, of his "psychic soil."[279]

Bowles' characters in his novels, short stories and translations – Dyar of *Let It Come Down*, Port and Kit in *The Sheltering Sky*, Stenham in *The Spider's House*, the Professor in "A Distant Episode", Allal in "Allal", Malika in "Here to Learn," – like Bowles the writer/translator and his native storytellers (Ahmed Yacoubi, Larbi Layachi, Abdesslam Boulaich, Mohammed Mrabet and Mohamed Choukri) are all in an intermediate position between two worlds. They are cultural nomads, travelling incessantly from past to present (from traditional stories to the angst of the present), from West to North Africa with its complex of desert and sea, Africa and Europe, East for Europe and West for the Arab World. Testifying to the pluralism in North Africa or more specifically the linguistic plurality that a translator faces, Abdelkebir Khatibi, in his *Maghreb pluriel*, declares

> Nous, les Maghrébins, nous avons mis quatorze siècles pour apprendre la langue arabe (à peu près), plus d'un siècle pour apprendre le français (à peu près); et depuis des temps immémoriaux, nous n'avons pas su écrire le Berbère. C'est dire que le bilinguisme et le pluriliguisme ne sont pas, dans ces régions, des faits récents.[280]

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[278] Caponi, *Paul*, (1994), 102. Letter to John Marshall of The Rockefeller Foundation from Harold Spivacke of the Library of Congress Music Division quoting Paul Bowles.

[279] Bowles, Windows, 34.

[280] Bouchra Benlemlih, *Inhabiting the Exotic: Paul Bowles and Morocco,* "The University of Nottingham, May, 2009), 179, [We North Africans have taken fourteen centuries to learn Arabic (nearly), more than a century to learn French (nearly), and from time immemorial, we have not learned how to write Berber. That is, bilingualism and plurilingualism are not, in this region, a recent phenomenon." [Benlemlih's translation].

> A l'école, un enseignement laïc, imposé à ma religion; je devins triglotte, lisant le français sans le parler, jouant avec quelques bribes de l'arabe écrit, et parlant le dialecte comme quotidien. Où, dans ce chassé-croisé, la cohérence et la continuité?[281]

And so in his autobiographical narrative, *La mémoire tatouée*, Khatibi speaks of how his education in Morocco played a key role in enhancing this state of being a polyglot. The American Bowles never denied his Americanness, nor did he accept being considered Moroccan; he dwelled in an interzone, an in-between space, and a "mezzaterra."[282] In such a way, Bowles' mediating position resists settlement and binary distinctions imposed by many critics forcing his text to fit into a label.

Tangier becomes the magical place or the twentieth century Mecca for the Western artists. Tangier is physically the interzone, mezzaterra or the zone in-between that reflects the hybridity of Bowles as a writer. As Benlemlih puts it

> Tangier reopens the zone of space, and connects the past to the present to produce a sense of continuity. Tangier is a bridge between the old and the new worlds, but a bridge that cannot be re-crossed; in effect, it is an allegory of the relationship between old and new, past and present. The topography of Tangier in Bowles' *Without Stopping* reminds us that we live in fiction anyway, that the dividing line between fiction and reality is not easily delineated[283]

Bowles engaged in many cultural projects and he chose his exile in a place where he found a space, where he could live as himself, neither as the

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[281] Benlemlih, *Inhabiting*, 179, [At school, with a secular education imposed on my religion, I became a triglot, reading French without being able to speak it, playing with some words of written Arabic, and speaking the dialect as my everyday language. Where in this confusion is coherence and continuity?] Benlemlih's translation,

[282] Defined previously on page 87.

[283] Benlemlih, *Inhibiting*, 44.

American Bowles nor as the Moroccan Bowles. He was married and he had queer affairs. He loathed modernity and wrote in its most sophisticated language. He avoided living in the West and wrote for a Western audience. His critics continue to debate his romanticism, existentialism, colonialism, post-colonialism, traditionalism, postmodernism, orientalism etc. In this part of the thesis we discuss his being "writer of writers" or simply a translator. At this junction, Benlemlih adds:

> Bowles will be able to perceive the successive bent in the tunnel-like course as well as the construction of being, where he feels farther from the world in the mazy borders, long spaces of hieroglyphs that form a labyrinth of letters, of the books that he makes. The familiar and unfamiliar, inside and outside are thus separated by an ambiguous and liminal space, an exotic city, reopening the frontier between logic and magic. This ambiguous and liminal space resonates with Bowles' inter/in-between zone: Tangier.[284]

The writer chose alienation and exile in Morocco; where Tangier offered him a space that corresponds to his crave for freedom. In Bowles' case, freedom is embraced by his imaginary interpretation of the space of in-betweeness. In Bowles' short story ''A Distant Episode," the professor of linguistics wants to operate between the Grand Hotel and the desert and shift positions in ''significant ways." He tells his friend: "They are expecting me back at the Hotel Saharien." The answer, "'You can't be there and here," is crucial in the general understanding of Bowles' oeuvre. The hotel as an expansion of the idea of home or Europe becomes the decentralised centre, the refuge and the familiar. The sentence uttered by the *qaouaji* is also focal in our approach to Bowles' position in his late works.

Ahmed Yacoubi, Larbi Layachi, Abdesslam Boulaich, Mohammed Mrabet and Mohamed Choukri are the Moroccan storytellers who spoke their collective

284 Benlemlih, *Inhibiting*, 166.

as well as individual stories to Bowles in Moghrebi. Bowles recorded, rearranged, shaped, wrote and published them. His chosen speakers were all illiterate as Bowles considered education a corruption to the pure mind. At the same time, translating these stories exposes to the world elements of the old Morocco or the North African desert's culture that people tend to ignore.

> I am inclined to believe that illiteracy is a prerequisite. The readers and writers I have tested have lost the necessary immediacy of contact with the material. They seem less in touch with both their memory and their imagination than the illiterates.[285]
>
> Magic, incarnations, the casting of spells, love potions and even death potions, are still a very important part of the fabric of [Moroccan] life, and it is not surprising that the young Moroccan artists ... should draw upon this facet of the indigenous culture for their inspiration.[286]

Bowles friends and storytellers were fishermen, guardians, waiters… they were poor and illiterate. Their stories fluctuate between past folklore, a present of struggle, and need for the money they could gain from Bowles who remained in their eyes American with all the entailments of the word: neo-colonialism, economic advantage, literary recognition etc. Because all the stories that are translated and written arrived to him orally, Bowles considers Choukri's *For Bread Alone* an exception, because it was written in literary Arabic, before he translates it. In his introduction to the translation of *For Bread Alone*, Bowles describes Choukri's life in the following words "Choukri grew up under conditions of poverty excessive even for Morocco. Eight of his brothers and sisters died of malnutrition and neglect. Another brother was killed outright by Choukri's father in an excess of anger and desperation."[287]

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[285] Benlemlih, *Inhibiting*, 80.

[286] Paul Bowles, *Travels: Collected Writings 1950-1993,* (UK: Harper Collins publishers, 2010), 42.

[287] Mohamed Choukri, *For Bread Alone,* (Saqi Books: 1973), 5.

Mrabet calls Bowles by "Nazarene" as a way to insist on his being non-muslim, which is of great importance for the Moroccan society to accept someone as member of the community (*Ummah*) or to exclude him.[288] Furthermore, the storytellers tended to invent stories knowing what their listener liked. Bowles notes that "They knew what I liked from the beginning. When they began to record things for me, they saw my reactions; they saw that I liked certain things, such as violence, and bloodshed and hatred, and so on. So they specialized in that, in general. I don't think Choukri did that, no. His long novel I translated, *For Bread Alone*, had enough of violence and unpleasantness to please me".[289]

In his interesting maturational process, Bowles changed the perspective from which the stories are told from that of the Westerner to that of the native North African characters. So in later works, mainly *The Spider's House,* one no longer beholds the native inhabitants only through the eyes of the Westerners but views the Westerners through the eyes of the native characters. Bowles translated the folk stories of his North African friends. These recordings of the storytellers in Moroccan Arabic and his translations archive an oral tradition gradually fading away to give the floor to a more Europeanised vision of life. Beginning in the late 1940s and continuing over several decades, Bowles translated a significant amount of Moroccan tales into English. In this process he discards the Western element to give full ground to the perspective of the cultural Other. These stories are difficult to categorise as they vary from the Western professor in the desert to the Moroccan girl in the United States. One of Bowles' readers, Allen Hibbard, suggests that the stories do tend to align themselves roughly according to

[288] Mrabet, *Marriage,* 1986, 23-24.

[289] Benlemlih, *Inhibiting*, 90.

thematic concern. Among these concerns Hibbard indicates are: "Tales of Gothic Horror," a label suggested by the dust jacket of *The Delicate Prey and Other Stories*, "Latin American Tales," and "Tales of Repression and Perversion."[290]

Hibbard's list suggests a thematic division that is unconvincing as all Bowles' stories contain elements of gothic horror and perversion. Indeed a geographical classification seems more appropriate. These stories share with Bowles' novels the need to search for identity and a better place to live. In "A Distant Episode", Bowles recalls elements in *The Sheltering Sky* and *The Spider's House*. "A Distant Episode" is the story of a professor of linguistics who travels to North Africa to study regional dialects. During his visit to a friend, he is spoken to by the *qaouaji* or the café keeper and confronted with the first hints of horror: that his friend has died. Then the *qaouaji* leads the professor to the desert and leaves him alone at a certain point. There is much fear in the narrator's words as in the professor's actions. Foltz notes: "The superiority of Western civilization is called into question as the Professor is attacked, captured, and rendered into little more than a performing animal."[291] The linguistic superiority he takes for granted is abruptly and violently taken from him when one of his captors "Seized his tongue and pulled on it with all his might. [...].The word 'operation' kept going through his mind; it calmed his terror somewhat as he sank back into darkness."[292] The Professor falls into a deep depression, deceived by his physical being and psychologically unable to reason. At the end of the story, this observer and outsider is destroyed "by the very cultural concepts he holds in such high regard, and he is left a madman - one without speech or reason - swallowed

[290] Foltz, Paul, 92.

[291] Foltz, Paul, 92.

[292] Paul Bowles, *Collected Stories 1939–1976*, Santa Barbara, (California: Black Sparrow, 1979), 45.

by the desert."[293] Bowles' first approach to the desert uses Western cultural garments that inhibit him from a complete surrender to the desert call for freedom.

For whole scenes of the story the linguist is unable to speak. He is immersed in silence, as if the narrator wanted to show the professor as an emblem of Western culture and civilisation in the alien Sahara. The North African desert alienates the Westerner who comes with his superior techniques to study a context he trivially judges simplistic and superficially governable. This may explain his inadequacy to explore the Sahara where his means are overthrown. Consequently, violence reigns over his life and all of the sudden he is reduced to an animal-like being. "The Professor attempts to bring the North Africans within his intellectual sphere by studying their language without even considering whether or not this might be possible; instead, he is removed from any of his previously recognizable points of reference and is 'domesticated' as a silent and disconnected oddity."[294]

In the Fifties, Bowles wrote four short stories in *A Hundred Camels in the Courtyard*. The stories take place in North Africa. They also reflect the influence of the Moroccan artists Bowles had become acquainted with during his years in Tangier. In 1967 *The Time of Friendship* was published; in it Bowles continues to explore the themes that constitute his narrative psyche: the traveller's quest towards the Other. Apart from Bowles' Latin American stories, *The Time of Friendship* sees Bowles surrendering his authorial position to a native narrator. Other more recent publications like *Midnight Mass* (1981) and *Unwelcome Words* (1988) again demonstrate Bowles' "highly polished skill", about which Allen Hibbard says: "Bowles does not

[293] Foltz, Paul, 97.

[294] Foltz, Paul, 97.

simply serve up tried and popular dishes, though familiar flavours are recognizable. He rather offers novel treats, lending both expected and unexpected flavours."[295] The nest Bowles established for his literature experienced radical changes between the late Fifties and the Eighties.

The scope of Bowles' admiration changed also; he kept the Western presence strong, but the perspective of the narration changed gradually from being Western-centred to one that strove to preserve the oral traditions of his friends and storytellers, Mrabet, Chokri and others against an invasion of globalising agents. In this respect, the fantastic, magical, metamorphic stories he began to translate opened "a whole new dimension to [his] writing experience," permitting, like the folk music he was collecting, a chance to preserve aspects of a disappearing culture and bringing him into contact with unfamiliar cultural practices.[296] As Campbell declares, that "The fantastic, magical, metamorphic stories" that Bowles translated brought about "a whole new dimension to [Bowles'] writing experience, permitting, like the folk music he was collecting, a chance to preserve aspects of a disappearing culture and bring him into contact with unfamiliar cultural practices."[297] Campbell bestows the quality of "hybrid form" to the "American traveler-writer and the stories of an alien land."[298] To the critic, Bowles' hybrid texts fit to the Spanish meaning of the word "translador"[299] as the person who

[295] Foltz, Paul, 102, I relied on the same source for the dates of publication.

[296] Bowles, *Stopping*,348.

[297] Bowles, *Stopping*, 348.

[298] Neil Campbell, "The External World of Paul Bowles", Perspectives on Contemporary Literature 10 (1984), in *Transatlantic Studies*, ed. Will Kaufman and Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson, (University Press of America, 2000), <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA17156449&v=2.1&u=wash89460&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w>, (11 May 2012), 178.

[299] Campbell, External, 176.

“transports”[300] ideas from one people or place to another, a definition which Bowles restricted to his will, “to carry it over the border intact."[301]

The desire to transport ideas from one language and audience to another without introducing changes explains Bowles’ fear of westernising North African oral tales. The question whether Bowles is simply the translator-transporter is the focus of the next pages. In *A World Outside: The Fiction of Paul Bowles*, Richard Patteson expands on the idea that Bowles' narrative is based on the interplay between exile, home, refuge and danger. Patteson argues that, for Bowles, the idea of “shelter” has not only the literal meaning of refuge, but also it covers “social, political, and religious systems;” and so, the concept of shelter becomes more “the complex edifices of society, faith, and personality,” than the sheer idea of individual domicile.[302] Patteson admits that the contrast between “civilization” in the Western space and the “vast expanses of desert” highlights the idea of “protective shelter” for the characters’ insidious feeling of alienation and loss.[303] In other words,

> The thematic interplay between the different meanings of shelter and safety also supplies a sense of dignity to human existence, an essential quality shared by the majority of Bowles's persistent and determined travellers.[304]

In his translations, Bowles exhibited his stagecraft by focusing on his encounter with the local space. Morocco played the role of a creating space where human imagination can be given free and full play in different and authentic ways from the beginning. The sense of loss and solitude in the desert with its infinite horizons, also, paves the way for the apprehension of

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[300] Campbell, External, 176.

[301] Bowles, *Stopping*, 348.

[302] Richard Patteson, *A World Outside: The Fiction of Paul Bowles*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 120.

[303] Patteson, *World*, 120.

[304] Foltz, Paul, 88.

a painting of sliding tableaux in time and space. His tableaux are described by his storytellers and he paints them. At this junction, the question is: is Bowles the master of his work? Is he only a translator?

It is impossible to generalise about the translations because they radiate in diversity in time, space and voice. In his "Introduction to Five Eyes", Bowles presents the series of stories he was about to forward to his Western audience as the products of a rich Moroccan oral tradition, "a repertory of Moroccan folk humor..."[305] intended to entertain. The entertaining trickster is a tradition in Arabic folklore and one of the figures, 'Hdidan Ahram' that Mrabet impressed Bowles to add in his collection of tales gathered in *Harmless Poisons, Blameless Sins*. Bowles' storytellers have individual ways and stories to tell but, as Bowles highlights in the introduction to his collection, there is "an underlying homogeneity among them" as "they spring from a common fund of cultural memories; the unmistakable flavour of Moroccan life pervades them all."[306]

Mohammed Mrabet's stories are the main source of Bowles' translations and he remained the man with whom the author had most contacts. Bowles depicts his most intricate storyteller as "Riffian, and his ideas coincide with those of the Riffians. As to other subject-matter, certain of his tales are variations on traditional folk-stories. Some contain more personal invention, and others are either wholly invented or recounted from personal experience. The core of his consciousness is bound up in traditional Moroccan folklore, and this is even more evident in his graphic work." [307] Mrabet confirms that the translations "Some were tales I had heard in the cafes, some were dreams, some were inventions I made as I was recording,

[305] Bowles, *Stopping*, 8.

[306] Bowles, *Stopping*, 5.

[307] Campbell, *Unfinished*, 307.

and some were about things that had actually happened to me".[308] Mrabet explains Bowles' lasting fascination of him by his capacity of inventing tales that successfully put on equal grounds the real and unreal, the past and present of the desert as the beating heart of the space of our and Bowles' concern. Other works of Mrabet/Bowles such as *Of Chocolate Creams and Dollars, Love with a Few Hairs, Look and Move On, The Boy who set the Fire* and *The Lemon* highlight the cross-cultural aspects of the Moroccan. Benlemlih adds:

> The complexity of Mrabet's style is manifested through the technique of embedding. The novel is marked by embedded stories in the sense of story within story, analogous to the frame-tale device – tales within tales within tales, a narrative strategy used by Scheherazade in The One Thousand and One Nights (Benaziza 2001).[309]

Because Mrabet's work is considered bizarre by most Western readers; a general overview of his tales is perhaps of assistance to the present analysis. The tales of Mrabet are complex in that they are thematically directed to a modern audience by their emphasis on the West's Other; and technically through the technique of embedding a story within story. The stories address the themes that the Maghrebian society of the after-independence was not ready to approach. If the Moroccan society was striving to recover from the colonial scars and to redefine its identity; the Western audience, in Bowles' conception of art, enjoys the non-us and the "exotic" law-free land. The topics one explores with Mrabet are poverty, exploitation, sexual exploitation, homosexuality, magic, myths, comic figures, violence, the encounter with the Other and drugs.

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[308] Mohammed Mrabet, *Look and Move On*, taped and translated by Paul Bowles. (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1976), 91.

[309] Benlemlih, *Inhibiting*, 83.

In Mrabet's *Chocolate Creams and Dollars*[310], the teller depicts Driss, the protagonist, as a fisherman who offers his servitude and sexual services to Mr. Hapkin and his guests. In *Chocolate Creams and Dollars*, Driss earns a good amount of money and starts his fishing business to become one of the rich people at the expense of his reputation and social life. But because the tale is about an Englishman, Driss, his father and Rais, it involves the struggle for power and an allusion to homosexuality, it was banned in Morocco.

Homosexuality is also a central theme in *Love with a Few Hairs*[311] where the protagonist, Mohammed continues to enjoy sex with Mr. David, even after his marriage. Mohammed is attracted by the Western style of life and for this reason he is rejected by his father and society. He is forced to marry Mina and to afford a heavy dowry that he gets from his English friend. Advised by Mr. David to treat her badly so she leaves him, Mohammed abuses of Mina. Then, following the same advisor, he has many affairs with different women and avoids loving them. The story ends with Mina and her two sons follow the protagonist in the street, he offers them money and escapes.

The Lemon depicts the struggle for survival of a twelve-year-old Moroccan boy, Abdeslam. The struggle starts within his family, with a violent father. Abdeslam adopts the life of homelessness and knows Bachir. Abdeslam understands Bachir's behaviour as kindness, while they are homosexual advances. Abdeslam finds work in a cafe and becomes more conscious of Bachir's aggressive tendencies. Abdeslam defends himself with a razor fixed in a lemon; he cuts the face of Bachir. In *The Lemon*, the struggle is set with society and not with the West.[312]

[310] Mohammed Mrabet, *Chocolate Creams and Dollars*, trans. Paul Bowles, (New York: Inanout Press1992).
[311] Mohammed Mrabet, *Love with a Few Hairs*, trans. Paul Bowles, (London: Owen, 1967).
[312] Mohammed Mrabet, *The Lemon*, trans. Paul Bowles, (London: Owen, 1969).

The process of translation helped Bowles understand Morocco. In "The Witch of Bouiba Del Hallouf", Mrabet tells of the battle between the *kif* smoker and his deceptive visions. This inspired Bowles' exploration of *kif* and *majoun*[313] drug-stories like "A Hundred Camels in the Courtyard."[314] "The Witch" opens the gates on the desert as an emblem of the whole North African territory and as the realm of spirits, phantasms, genii, '*affrita,*[315] witchs and spells. Mrabet's Morocco is the space of religious practice made in trans-dance for the sake of little known saints. The magical practice is essentially a healing force, both in its use of herbs and potions of love, health and death, and as a weapon against the unknown. According to Bowles, "Ritual and Belief in Morocco is still perfectly valid, even though it describes an ever-decreasing segment of the population. The customs and beliefs it expounds still operate in the manner described by Westermarck."[316] This mixture of religion and magic persists in the translations. Bowles puts into play all his literary influence and practicality to capture the stories before they disappeared forever. It is in this way that Bowles grasped the themes and oral techniques of his storytellers.

In fact, Bowles immersed himself in the Moroccan storytelling and in time it endowed him with the mysterious energy of the world of creativity and excitement. As a translator, Bowles forged a kind of "third mind" which had the power to resist conformity and project an alternative vision of life which did not simply consist of already established and accepted modes and

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313 ***"Mad'joun*** [Hind., from Arabic *ma'j. n* .] An intoxicating confection from the hemp plant; -- used by the Turks and Hindoos", (October 15, 2014), <http://www.encyclo.co.uk/search.php?word=madjoun>.

314 Paul Bowles, *A Hundred Camels in the Courtyard*, (City Lights, 1962), 6.

315 "Afrit or afreet in Islamic mythology, a class of infernal jinn (spirits below the level of angels and devils) noted for their strength and cunning. An ifrit is an enormous winged creature of smoke, either male or female, who lives underground and frequents ruins." *Encyclopedia Britannica,* (October 15, 2014), < http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/afrit>.

316 Campbell, *Unfinished,* 301.

concepts of thought. Bowles' interest in catching an authentic Moroccan voice leads him to the group of illiterate speakers. He says,

> Naturally I want to preserve what remnants I can of the old way of seeing life. The translations seem to me a valid method of doing this. I also was eager to record the folk music while it still existed, and it was 23 years before the Rockefeller Foundation made it possible.[317]

The activities of Bowles, the translator, are varied and as hybrid as the storytellers and the writer. All are torn between past and present and between the desert behind and modernity ahead, which suggests an uncertainty about Bowles' different roles. The ambivalence stems from the complex relations between Bowles as writer and translator. The storytellers, while evoking their own culture and personal angst mingle with Bowles in the postcolonial North African space. This includes the interzone of Tangier, where he lives, and the desert, where his muse dwells. The stories invite readers to question Bowles' authorship over translated oral stories that have traditional weight and modern form. Anyway it is impossible for illiterate storytellers to give the Western form the stories have. There is a space between the author and the translator, an interzone, bordering two different edges, the past of orality and the present of the vulgarised printed text.

That zone between the bridging lines is the one Julia Kristeva theorises as the space in abjection or a position between the subject and the object, a space of negation and acceptance of both the "I" and the "Other." Kristeva's work on space depicts how the "Semiotic" is directed towards the "ordered forms of meaning which constitute the Symbolic,"[318] the pre-linguistic period during which the infant experiences his first identity as a an encounter between

[317] Campbell, *Unfinished,* 296.

[318] Russell West-Pavlov, *Space in Theory: Kristeva, Foucault, Deleuze*, (New York: Radopi, 2009), 45.

space and time, as she cites, in her *New Maladies*, "Joyce said 'father's time, mother's species'."[319] She, perhaps, means that fathers transmit time and history; while mothers are privileged by evoking space. But the most interesting idea, which relates Kristeva's work to the third space of Bowles authoritative identity, is in her interest in the obscure spaces of language and unknown to the linguistic apparatus, such as ancient paintings in some lost caves or different "cultural realms." The "non-linear systems of semiosis", or earlier manifestations of meanings, as Pavlov explains, " are to be found in caves—out of sight, below the surface of our culture, coming to light only after millennia of obscurity."[320] The other space is central in the understanding of Kristeva's work on identity and Bowles' position. Kristeva defines this space declaring that,

> On close inspection, all literature is probably a version of the apocalypse that seems to me rooted, no matter what its sociohistorical conditions might be, on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so—double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject.[321]

The word "abject" is derived from the past participle of the Latin *abicere*, meaning "to discard" or "to throw away" ("abject"), which is directly related to Kristeva's notion of "dark revolts of being"[322] in the opening passage of *Powers of Horror.* It literalises the breakdown of the distinction between subject and object that is crucial for the establishment of identity and for our entrance into the symbolic order. What we are confronted with when we

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[319] West-Pavlov, *Space,* 43.

[320] West-Pavlov, *Space,* 41.

[321] Julia kristev, *the powers of horror an essay on abjection,* http://www.csus.edu/indiv/o/obriene/art206/readings/kristeva%20-%20powers%20of%20horror%5B1%5D.pdf, (2/2/2014), 207.

[322] Kristeva, *Powers*, 1.

experience the trauma of seeing a human corpse (particularly the corpse of a friend or family member) is our own eventual death made palpably real. As Kristeva puts it, "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject."[323] Bowles' translations of Moroccan oral stories materialize mixture and hybridity, as a version of what lays in-between forms of culture, blurring boundaries and unsettling the usual binaries.

In the beginning of *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva, as a psychoanalytical theorist, declares that the first experience of abjection happens at the point of separation from one's mother. For Kristeva abjection is the moment the child refuses the mother for the law of the father. In this prospect, the abject "is radically excluded" and, as Kristeva explains, "draws me toward the place where meaning collapses."[324] It is neither object nor subject; the abject is situated, rather, at a place before we entered into the symbolic order, as Kristeva explains further,

> Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be.[325]

The abject addresses what Kristeva terms a "primal repression," before even the establishment of the opposition conscious/unconscious and all the following binaries. Kristeva emphasises that the abject is the moment in one's "psychosexual development" when we assimilate the difference between human and animal or man and woman, between culture and that which preceded it. On the level of archaic memory, Kristeva refers to the primitive effort to separate ourselves from the animal: "by way of abjection, primitive

[323] Kristeva, *Powers*, 4.

[324] Kristeva, *Powers*, 2.

[325] Kristeva, *Powers*, 10.

societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder."[326] On the level of our individual psychosexual development, the abject marks the moment when we separate ourselves from the mother, when we began to recognize a boundary between "me" and Other, between "me" and "(m)Other."

At this level of the consciousness and dimension of the “I,” the abject is perceived by Kristeva as "a precondition of narcissism,"[327] that is to understand, a precondition for the narcissism of the mirror stage, which occurs after we establish these primal distinctions. It is of crucial importance to know that the abject debunks meaning and dismantles it into a moment of return to the "primal repression." The abject deals mainly with "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules"[328] and, so, it includes hybridity and queerness. Such queerness is abject precisely because it foregrounds the "fragility of the law."[329]

In the way the abject manifests itself, and is applied to our consideration of Bowles' authorship, in his late writings/translations, we reach the idea of the undecidability of his position as when we fear to dwell in the abject and to identify with it. It provokes us into recalling a state of being prior to signification (or the law of the father as Kristeva would put it) where we feel a sense of helplessness. The abject is “[t]he in-between, the ambiguous, the composite,” and it “simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject.”[330] In his abjection, Bowles is “threatened by something that is

[326] Kristeva, *Powers*, 12-13.

[327] Kristeva, *Powers*, 13.

[328] Kristeva, *Powers*, 4.

[329] Kristeva, *Powers*, 4.

[330] Kristeva, *Powers*, 4-5.

not part of us in terms of identity and non-identity"[331], the author of his translations and not. The abject is a moment of undecidability of identity. The state of the abject is a state of degeneration of the possible imaginary lines dividing things and defining identities and the abject becomes a true threat because the known systems and conception of order have been dismantled. Hence, Kristeva's theory of abjection is concerned with figures that are in a state of transition or transformation. The abject is located in a liminal state that is on the margins of two positions. This state is particularly interesting to Kristeva because of the link between psychoanalysis and the subconscious mind. The same state is important to the reading of Bowles' authorship while translating the native Moroccan oral stories.

Bowles' translations place Bowles in an in-between position as they invite the reader to try to distinguish between "traditional" and "modern"; "oral" and "written;" "here" and "there;" "colonial" and "postcolonial" and finally I and Other. Bowles' translations are trailblazing as they break the rules and blur the differences in fusing writer and translator. Many critics, including Benlmlih, regard Bowles' position in postcolonial Morocco as being neocolonial. On the contrary, I suggest that Bowles' fiction is a political act, designed to give floor to the Other, allowing him to speak his ideas. In this way, Bowles breaks with the Anglo-American tradition of silencing third world subjects and questions the mastery of Western languages. Bowles spoke Moghrebi and showed that poetics can come before politics, and so storytellers are Moroccan and they are given a central position compared to his as a translator. It is the opposite of the colonial literature, where the natives are often marginalised; while the Western speaker is put in a position of an all-knowing narrator of the colonised subjects. Benlemlih avers, "in any

[331] Kristeva, *Powers*, 4.

case Bowles is aware that translation is primarily the transportation or 'transfer' of meanings into foreign territories, [...]. His original is not just oral/traditional, but the product of a modern man, very much someone on the borders and margins, hence reflecting various adaptations to modernity."[332] It is in terms of "trans" that the critic Lindsey Moore approaches the work of Bowles and his tellers, she confirms:

> The work I have discussed is nevertheless thematically, structurally, and philosophically invested in the challenges of transcoding, translation, and transvaluation. It is in this context that Bowles' lengthy commitment to collaboration with Moroccan storytellers should be interpreted.[333]

Moore admits that Bowles' commitment to giving voice to the Other is an extraordinary act that resists identity and shelters in nomadism. In his mission of bordering two different spaces, as Kristeva emphasises, Bowles approaches the native Moroccan stories by adhering to an expression of horror that inhabits the human nature and inhibits being the Other. Indeed, his use of language in translation and rewriting the North African voice is "Not a language of the desiring exchange of messages or objects that are transmitted in a social contract of communication and desire beyond want, but a language of want, of the fear that edges up to it and runs along its edges."[334] In *Revolt, She Said*, Kristeva criticises the modern meaning attributed to "revolt" as perceived by individuals and glorified by states; and hence she suggests a backward farsightedness that helps "meaning return, returning, discovering, uncovering, and renovating."[335] For Kristeva, revolt is

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[332] Benlemlih, *Inhabiting*, 160.

[333] Lindsey Moore, "Modernity at the Margins: Paul Bowles' Let it Come Down, The Spider's House, and Moroccan Collaborations", Lancaster: The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, <http://0jcl.sagepub.com.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/content/47/1/91.full.pdf+html> (04/11/2014, 14:20), 104.

[334] Kristeva, *Powers*, 38.

[335] Kristeva, *Powers*, 85.

also the power of the abject, "potential for making gaps, rupturing, renewing"[336] which is the raison d'être of Bowles' translations.

Bowles translated a set of oral folkloric stories, which his storytellers admitted being mainly inventions. As Choukri comments, in *Paul Bowles Wa Uzlat Tanja*,[337]

الحكاية تتغير عند كتابتها.

What we see in Bowles' fiction as the irrational and unexplained violence and horror become with Mrabet and Chokri the downright mood of their stories. Their cast of characters is the desert and its people of witches, prostitutes, sages, saints, tricksters and assassins; and their settings are deserts, bars, restaurants, hotels and brothels. On the one hand, Bowles' counter-discourse to Western rationalism and civilisation mocks and debunks its order. On the other hand, he tames the oral stories to the dictates of the fiction of the very culture he chastises. This is because he translates "what is marginal, what is not established, what is not institutional, what is not mainstream culture,"[338] of the North African area. He also assures us that he never intervenes with his storytellers. He comments that

> [They] are not exactly collaborations. I only get the authors to talk, you see. The stories are their own. My function is only to translate, edit, and to cut; now and then I have to ask a question to clarify a point. [339]

Bowles' attempts to seize storytellers' voices in translation and transport them authentically to the English shores were betrayed by his being both writer and translator at the same time. He translates some stories that belong

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[336] Kristeva, *Powers*, 85.

[337] Choukri, *Paul*, 118, "a story must change once it is written." [Translation mine].

[338] Abd elhak Elghandor, *Cross-Cultural Encounters and the Image of the Other in Paul Bowles' Fiction*, PhD thesis, (University of Ohio, 1994), 319.

[339] Benlemlih, *Inhabiting*, 106.

to some storytellers, but putting them into a written fiction form, specific style and genre make of him the writer. Bowles' presence is more remarkable than he has previously declared. His intervention investigates the position of the translator as transporter. Indeed, the translation places Bowles somewhere in a position between translator and author. An epitome of his intervention is in the introduction to *A Life Full of Holes*. Bowles describes how he disagrees with Layachi who omitted an episode in "The Shepherd." In this episode, "the narrator insists on spending the night at the tomb of Sidi Bou Hajja in order to see if the bull with horns will appear."[340] Bowles insisted on the importance of the episode as a *jahillit*[341] practice that endures up until contemporary times. By overruling Layachi and including the tomb episode in the published autobiography, Bowles acted the part of the writer/translator, as he places his own preferences above those of the storytellers.[342] Bowles justifies his choice by a technical need to explain to his Western audience the influence of pagan pre-Islamic culture on Morocco, and that the gaps between cultures and languages dictate his engagement with the content of the stories, and his storytellers do not have knowledge of writing exigencies.[343] It is in this way that a "vortex of summons and repulsion"[344] and a hail of confusion swarm around his authorship. He adds that his translation is far beyond a literal interpretation of the oral stories but as Benlemlih declares

[340]Benlemlih, *Inhabiting*, 107.

[341] "Restrictively, the pre-Islamic pagan times of the Arabian Peninsula," <http://islamicencyclopedia.org/public/index/topicDetail/id/475>

[342] Benlemlih, *Inhabiting*, 108.

[343] Bowles, *Letters*, 245-246. ''But if there was a section that I didn't think belonged, I would tell the Moroccan: So, what does this mean? Or: Let's cut that out and go from here straight to here. That I did do. Or sometimes I would say: No one's going to understand this, you have to explain why, what it is. A Moroccan would understand, but a European won't know what's *sous-entendu* [between the lines]. It has to be explained!"

[344] Kristeva, *Powers*, 1.

> In *Chocolate Creams and Dollars*, the language of the novel is plain. It shows more than it tells, albeit not like Hemingway, where there is a sense of something happening behind or beneath the words, in the not-said. Short words, short sentences that mark minimalism of style abound. To make Mrabet minimalistic means to show that "Less is more" is the way to strong writing. Somehow Bowles translates Mrabet to make him a modernist like Hemingway as much as he is a primitive.[345]

The simple style and the natural flow that characterise a Nobel Prize winner like Hemingway cannot be the linguistic capacity of illiterate native storytellers Bowles relies on to get his stories, but the work of a connoisseur and a master of Bowles' fiction and "the line between author and translator is indistinct in any translation, but with Bowles it seems to disappear altogether."[346] It is exactly the way Kristeva defines the abject as "perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them"[347].

According to Kristeva, the best modern literature (Dostoevsky, Proust, Artaud, Céline, Kafka, etc.) explores the place of the abject, a place where confines collapse and where one dwells in an archaic space before such linguistic binaries as self/Other or subject/object. For Kristeva, literature is the privileged space for both the sublime and abject. In fact, in the "fragile" borderline of the abject and in his queer dwelling in the middle of the Oriental exotic mist of hashish and Majoun and with naked dancers, in a far reached white turtle-like or snail-like construction and lost in the desert, Bowles', his storytellers' and protagonists' "abject identities do not exist or barely so."

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[345] Benlemlih, *Inhabiting*, 113.

[346] Caponi, *Paul*, 1998, 131.

[347] Kristeva, *Powers*, 15.

So far I have tried to highlight the ambivalent position, focal in Bowles' career as translator/author, who considers fiction as a translation of reality. His translation project ensured the connectedness of different genres as well as different languages through mediation and "liminality," the threshold which permits the passage from one idea into the other. In this sense, translations provide a framework for exploring Bowles' ideology after long years in North Africa. After wandering its deserts and knowing its secret language, Bowles is no longer Western in his approach to the place he eternalises in his work. Considering that he wrote for a living, I have argued that he attempted to the best of his ability to respect and attract his Western audience. But Bowles the translator and writer of tradition entered a mysterious underworld with horrific and sublime moments of recognition of the humility of being in the vast and immense background of the desert that exorcised its sorcery to counterfeit a sudden moment of disremember or *smemora.*

The poetics and politics in Bowles are intertwined and his action, to raise poor illiterate people to the rank of professional writers, has the sublime of the desert behind it. It is the desert, a form of death in life that makes men equal and gives them the same chance to cross it or to mix with its sands and belong to its realm for ever. Bowles is a traveller *par excellence* and travellers adopt a different chronology and dwell in difference.

II

Ibrahim Alkoni: The Quester for a Mythical Identity Construction in the Desert

Introduction

"I teach you the overman. Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?" –*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

"Unicorns, dragons, witches may be creatures conjured up in dreams, but on the page their needs, joys, anguishes, and redemptions should be just as true as those of Madame Bovary or Martin Chuzzlewit."

— Alberto Manguel, Dark Arrows: Great Stories of Revenge

"I think there are some things we have lost, and we should try perhaps to regain them, because I am not sure that in the kind of world in which we are living and with the kind of scientific thinking we are bound to follow, we can regain these things exactly as if they had never been lost; but we can try to become aware of their existence and their importance."

- Claude Levi-Strauss, Myth and Meaning.

The desert is that mysterious world with its eternally moving sands, scarce rain, dangerous insects and terrifying emptiness that is met by the creative artistic talent of its inhabitants and travellers. However, desert people,[348] in general, had decided to face the challenges, to fuse with the miserly nature, and to respond in rhymes. The Bedouins' quest is meant to "create a possibility of life, an artistic parallel world in which both the human power of existing and the one of the space mingle and interact […]."[349]

[348] I use the expression desert people to mean Bedouin or nomads.

[349] Saad Albazii, *The Culture of the Desert: a Study of the Contemporary Arabian Literature*, (Abican Publication: Riadh, 1991), 34.

The desert was central in ancient Arabic literature, because it was the land of pre-Islamic nomads. It is the space where monolithic religions were born and expanded. Indeed, poetry remained for long the main literary genre to vehicle the Bedouin culture and to tell the story of the land of myth and wisdom. However, after new literary genres entered the cultural and artistic scene, the desert remained in the margins of fiction that focused on big metropolis and their infinite problems. The focus of the following part is on Arabic literature and the desert.

The Arabic novel and the desert

Before the *Arabic Renaissance*[350] and the rise of the novel following the western genre, the desert was a marginal theme. During that epoch, the Arab city was rediscovered in the Arab world by its literary recreation in the novel genre that was primarily a European influence, in that many Arab writers study in Europe and adopt Western novels to the Arabic language and culture. Thus, for instance, one finds *Tartuffe* of Moliere in the Arabic language and with Arabic names, in a way the Arabic audience is not alienated. On the other hand, after an Arabic long tradition in composing

[350] The nineteenth century brought the illumination of Enlightenment to North Africa. Whether many Arabic historians prefer to call it Reform/Islah, Enlightenment/tanwir, or awakening /yaqzah; it is a social, political and literary renaissance that "can be hardly possible in a stagnant period." Modern schools and universities, massive paper issuing and literary and artistic production are at the foreground of the general picture that portrays the Renaissance in the Orient/ Mashreq of the period. The Occident or Maghreb had a different experience with renaissance that came much later. Based on Diana Elvira's *Libyan Literature from the Colonial Period until the Present* and Isabella Camera D'Afflitto's book on *Contemporary Arabic Literature*, the following is a cultural overview of the twentieth-century Libya. When we speak of culture, politics and language, North Africa affiliates with the Arab World, to which it was united by the Islamic conquests and followed by a long process of Arabisation. This area had known the first Nahdah Renaissance with the Arabic Empire of the Islamic conquests led by the prophet Muhammad, the Omayyad (661-750) and Abbasid (750-1258) dynasties that conquered and governed a vast region from India to Spain, passing from Turkey and half of the African continent. The early Renaissance had been focused on scientific research, important translations including Greek philosophy, social change, economic growth and literary and philosophical production centred on the Koran and including the Persian and Turkish historical figures. The focus in this part is the modern Renaissance of the nineteenth century that had had earlier manifestation in Aleppo in the seventeenth century; but its idea expanded with the Egyptian Muhammad Ali (1769-1849). The recent Cultural Revolution that involves the encounter between West and Orient started with the Napoleonic expedition in Egypt (1798-1801). This concept is meant to show the importance of the Arabic Renaissance in the literary scene that paves the way to a deep understanding of Ibrahim Alkoni's literature. D'Afflitto, *Contemporary*, 51-3.

poetry, writing fiction enables the writer to go into details and describe new phenomena. These writers paid attention to cities, following the example of Western novelists. Then, their writings covered also the rural countryside but almost no one, for long decades, considered the desert that geographically covers more than two-thirds of the general landscape, in the "Arab World."[351] Indeed, writing fiction in the Western style used to consider the desert as the enigmatically arid and empty exotic space; and hence it is put aside by Arab novelists until writers like Abd Arrahman Munif and Ibrahim Alkoni came forth to change the literary scene.

The twentieth-century writers on the Arabian Sahara,[352] mainly those who come from the desert and studied in Europe, experienced two different cultures, the first as based on essential and vital "needs" or *tharoura* and the second as "a society of luxury" and the race for power.[353] These writers "noticed the difference between these two societies; as in the desert, there is a paradox between place and nature, while in cities it is between man and culture."[354] It is this paradox and discrepancy that triggered Arab novelists to divert their attention towards the desert. Moreover, in front of a massive mutation of desert people in life, culture, interests and physical appearance, fiction finds another space to cover literarily and to discover poetically. They are alarmed by the "ill-treatment of the pristine nature" of the Sahara, "as well as the trial at its richness […] and the metamorphosis of its people's tradition, creed and laws because of the civilization that comes with the

[351] The geographical area that has Arabic as the official language extends approximately from Iraq to Morocco.
[352] Here I use the expression Arabian Sahara to include Middle Eastern desert and North African desert and this is a Western approach that tends to include all the ethnic groups and the languages under one political division. In many circumstances this definition is considered inclusive and oppressive to other origins, ethnicities and creed in the same geographical area.
[353] Said Ghanemi, *Malhamat Al-Houdud Al-Kuswa: Al-Mikyal As-Sahrawi Fi Adab Ibrahim Al-Koni*, (*Epic Ceilings: the Desert Imaginary in Ibrahim Alkoni's literature*), (Casablanca: The Arab Cultural Center, 2000), 16, [translation mine].
[354] Ghanemi, *Epic*, 16, [translation mine].

outsiders."[355] These few writers either took one aspect of the desert or they dedicated one of their works to the Arabian Sahara. For instance, one can read Arabian desert novels of Ghassan Kanafani's *All that is Left to You* and *Men in the Sun*, Miral al-Tahawy's *The Tent* and *The Blue Aubergine,* Sabri Moussa's *The Corrupted Places*, Raja Aalim's *Saint Wahdana*, and Muhammed al-Ashri's *Gold Fountain* and *Saharan Apple*. In North Africa and Sudan, one finds Tayab Salah's *The Season of Migration to the North*, Habib al-Sayih's *Tamazirt* and *That Love,* rachid Boujidra's *Timimoun*, Mussah Ibn Ibnou's *The city of the Wind*, and Malika Mokkadim's *The Forbidden*.[356]

On the other hand, the desert of our interest is historically the one after World War II, the one that has changed and witnessed a radical shift for the discovery of the "black gold." That huge empty space without real economic interest, in the last seventy years has become overpopulated. In fact, the Sahara is transformed into the focal interest of many powers, which fuelled many writers to direct their attention towards this area.

In fact, the topics in the Arabic novel on the desert fluctuate mainly between the political approach as a way to chastise the dictators of the Arabic states, and the historical approach showing the natural harshness of the desert as part of the rite of passage from one point to another geographically and mentally. On the other hand, this literature is focused on the aesthetic questions and the affirmation of the Arabic novel. If novelists show their interest in the desert, it is simply because of its geographical prodigious stretching-out. All the Arab states have the desert and many of them are completely deserts. This surface occupies an important place in the hearts of its people, even if writers from Saharan origins focus mainly on its

[355] Ghanemi, *Epic*, 16, [translation mine].
[356] Amina Branin, *Fatha' as-Sahra fi al-Riwaya al-Arabiyya: al-Majus, The Space of Desert in the Arabic Novel: The Animists*, (2011), <http://www.nooonbooks.com/reader/pdf/index/bookId/2215/hash/c7dacceacc59a45cc2d9b407c109599491c54de7757e85b9c39e9b0b36b91a42/#page/4/mode/1u>, [translation mine], 20-2.

harshness, as T. E Lawrence assures that Bedouins hate the desert and worship the sea. The contradictory situation is that desert for the Arab writer is part of his being, land, nation and sacredness.

The Islamic religion is the most important one for the Arabs, though there are other powerful religions in many Arabic states. In this prospect, the desert witnessed the birth of the Mohammedan religion and its expansion. Once a year the Muslims visit the desert for pilgrimage.

One more facet is that the Arabian culture is completely bound to the desert like the Pre-Islamic poetry, the mythology and early forms of story-telling. Even though world history evoked the role of the desert as the stage of two world wars, the turning point in the history of the Bedouins, indeed, is the discovery of oil "as if it is regaining its antique leading role in world economy."[357] Gharbi reminds his audience of the important role the desert played in the commercial trajectories that linked the West to India. The arid area that had watched the migration of its people became, in the twentieth-century, an attractive centre for economic growth and military settlements. People from all over the world migrate to the promised earth of gold and diamonds. The transformation of the futile into fertile, the abundance of work, movement and wealth encouraged the cultural growth. Theories about the desert as the cradle of arts, literature and myth became the debate on cultural supremacy of the orient against the Occident. The west hence discovered the desert and built up its theories and formed the world of its particularities; yet the people of the desert had been superficially depicted by the majority of western writers, who tried to label a population characterised by diversity in words such as Bedouins, Arabs, and Semites. These words take part in a Western tradition of writing the East that the first

[357] Mohammed Gharbi, "The Shift from the Autobiographical Novel to the Epic one: Abdul Rahman Munif", (l'Université de Tunis 9 Avril, 2002), 41, [translation mine].

chapter tries to briefly present. It is the literary background of the writers, who are interested in the desert and like Bowles and Alkoni try to recreate it from a different point of view.

Fantasy and illusion are the Western eye on the desert. The writers from their attic see in the emptiness and the vastness imagined people. In fact, the desert is read as an exotic text that offers its readers a space to give free rein to their fantasies out of rigid laws and cities. In this idea, Lambert Edwige declares that the Sahara in the Arabic language has the same sound of /sihr/ or magic. Indeed the desert is associated with the mythical and the magical of which Gharbi says: "the Arabic desert, […] like China, India, the antique Greece and the territories of the native Americans, sorted its own myths and fables."[358] The idea of mystery and wilderness that can fill the empty land makes of the desert a particular space in antagonism with the materialism of cities at least before the oil period. Furthermore contemporary literature marks a return to the antique and classic stories fusing the Arabian past with a western reference as a way to found an identity accounting for its geographical and historical background. It is also a movement to correct the long-termed view of the desert as "backwardness and brutality."

The discovery of oil has completely changed the map of the desert, its myths, fables, dreams and oases. People from all over the world migrated to the Sahara that incubates a bizarre human mix. The novel, as a genre, is the best literary medium to describe the complexity of the desert as context, text and meta-text. However, the people of the desert do not all talk about the desert in their novels; Abd Arahman Munif is the best epitome for the son of the desert who centres his novels on other political and social problems. Instead of the Bedouin's heirs, others who went to teach in Arabian Peninsula recalled their experiences in the Nomadic space. This is why the Arabic novel

[358] Gharbi, Shift, 41, [translation mine].

can be at a first-hand divided into two main approaches: stories written by Arabs from other Arab states and stories by the Arabs from the desert. A shared characteristic is the poetic language that both evokes and invokes the importance that Arabic poetry (mainly the pre-Islamic one) devoted to the theme of the desert. The aesthetics of the desert (before the "emergence of the central ink spot") glorified the simple life coated by the goodness of its people in spite of its complete isolation of the modernized and highly technological world. Gharbi declares,

> This is what the writer Abd Arahman Munif presents us in his *Loss* from his famous quintet whose main theme is the Arabian Peninsula before and after the discovery of the central "ink spot." He exhibits all the places of the desert: the oasis conveys and the desert valleys that kept people busy waiting them, inflamed them with the news and merchandise that it brought about. [359]

Traditionally, the desert was a poetic element and rhythm in the pre-Islamic period. In fact, the Arabs are the people who most mix up with the sand and have the desert as the imaginary space and the source of linguistic experience and poetic inspiration. This intimate relationship was built up through time. The Arabs know its breeze and winds, its heat and cold. They conditioned their lives accordingly: nomadic movements, static seasons, way of getting food and commerce. This reality was transformed by a certain muse into verse; then into a major component of the *Kassid* or the *Jahilit*[360] poem. Clement Huart, a professor at the Ecole Des Langues Orientales in Paris, says in his book on Arabic literature

> Range after range of grey serrated mountain peaks; southward, again, huge plains, stretching to endless horizons, and strewn with blackish pebbles; and, last of all, the sandy Desert, tinged with red, its rolling drifts blown hither and thither by the winds, to the unceasing terror of the traveler: such are the regions which part Arabia from the rest of the earth, and which made it for so long a time a land of mystery on every other side, the sea. […]. It was from the Desert, then, that Arab poetry was to come; for the towns were too

[359] Gharbi, Shift, 12, [translation mine].
[360] Jahhilit means pre-Islamic period.

> much preoccupied with commercial matters to give literature any chance of growth.[361]

The poetry of the desert dismantles what we perceive now in terms of the form/content binary. The desert is one of the themes and also the means to convey the other themes of the poem; by inspiring the speakers linguistically and culturally. The Arabian typical poem is structured in the following way: standing by the ruins or *dhikr al-atlal*, prelude or *nasib*, the motivation to leave the tribe or *rahil* and the main topic, *madih* or praise, *hija* or satire, *ritha* or elegy, and *ghazel* or love. In the three recurrent parts, the desert plays a major role in providing, imagery, metaphors, natural elements and cultural aspects. Even in the themes of the *qassida*, the desert continues to influence the poetics and ethics of the text.[362]

Loss in the desert is a poetic experience that is lived as an initiation to life, like floating into one's mother's womb. The contact with the no-man's land where life is almost impossible in the absence of the primordial elements like water and food, teaches the very sense of life and the pleasure it can afford to the lost and cast away speakers. The horse or the camel is the companion-friend of the poet to whom he speaks of his agonies and reveals his secrets. He tells the nights and its stars about his beloved and his dreams as a young man. In turn, the stars lead him to the way of safety.

The journey is a recurrent theme in the poetry of the *Jahhilya.*[363] It allows the speaker to externalize his place with the details of life in the desert: birds, winds, insects, animals, ways, roads, peoples and customs. The best example

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[361] Clement Huart, *A History Of Arabic Literature*, (New York: D. Appleton And Company, 1903), 8-9.

[362] For further information see, Farrin Raymond, *Abundance from the Desert: Classical Arabic Poetry*, (Syracuse University Press, 2011), <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/universityofessex/reader.action?docID=10534252> (16/12/2014, 14:36).

[363]The "pre-Islamic Arabia." For further information see, Oxford Bibliographies, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0142.xml> (16/12/2014, 14:02).

we find is the seven or ten long poems known as *Mu'allaqat*[364] like the one of Imru' Alkais' narrative poems that describes his journey to the Roman Cesar to ask help to regain his father's reign[365].

The Arabian poetry of the *Jahhilya* was not only the map of the traveller throughout the desert, but also the theme of the poem and its major structural component; the Sahara had become also a tradition in writing verse and part impartial of its structure. Hamed says:

> ولا نبالغ إذا قلنا أننا نجد في كل قصيدة جاهلية أثرا ظاهرا من أثار الصحراء، بل نجد هذا الأثر في شعر جميع العصور التي اقتفت الشعر الجاهلي في ألفاظه ومعانيه وصوره ولكي ندرك اثر الصحراء في ديوان العرب إدراكا شاملا دقيقا لا بد من استقراء ديوان الشعر العربي ومجموعاته المختلفة. فالشعر الجاهلي يعد شعرا لصيقا بالصحراء بل إن الشعر العربي كله في جميع العصور يحمل شيئا من سمات الصحراء وطابعها [...]
> [366]

In fact, the desert influenced and monitored the themes of Arabic poetry, which informs us about an antique period, about the environment, the people, and their activities and that brings the Sahara in its form and content. The desert is a moral component. Its people, as indicated in their chivalric verses, defend principles which have a direct link to desert life like courage in facing death, patience in educating the self to bear difficulties, generosity in offering help, brotherhood, pardon etc. On the structure of the *kassid*, Clement Huart argues

> At this epoch, the qasida had already reached its definite form. According to the ancient rules quoted by Ibn Qutaiba, the author of a qasida must begin by a reference to the forsaken camping-grounds. Next he must

[364] The seven ancient odes hanged on Mecca. For further information see, A. J. Arberry, "The Seven Odes," (London, 1957), <http://www.kister.huji.ac.il/sites/default/files/seven%20odes.pdfhttp://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/hanged/>, (16/12/2014, 15:043).

[365] Hamad bin Nasser Al-Dakhil, "The Influence of the Desert in the Genesis and Evolution of Arabic Poetry until the end of the Second Abbasid Era", (the Journal of Umm Al Qura University for Science Sharia and Arabic Language and Literature, Volume: 14, Issue: 23, December 2001, 1225-1296), 16.

[366] Al-Dakhil, Influence, 32, "We do not exaggerate when we say that we find in every pre-Islamic poem a clear reference to the desert. We find this influence in all the poetry that tracked pre-Islamic odes in their words, meanings, and imagery. To realize the importance of the desert in Arabic collections of verse, it is necessary to go through it all. The Sahara is central to Pre-Islamic poetry and the entire Arab poetry owes much to the desert", [translation mine].

> lament, and pray his comrades to halt, while he calls up the memory of the dwellers, who had departed in search of other encampments and fresh water-springs. Then he begins to touch on love-matters, bewailing the tortures to which his passion puts him, and thus attracting interest and attention to himself. He recounts his tired and toilsome journeying in the Desert, dwells on the lean condition of his steed, which he lauds and describes; and finally, with the object of obtaining those proofs of generosity which were the bard's expected meed and sole support, he winds up with a panegyric of the Prince or Governor in whose presence the poem is recited[367].

Desert poets took their imagery from their land. The desert was the poet's muse, imagery and theme; a voice echoed from a far place and time to tell us about those people's lives. Indeed, the Arabs colonised a large area of the world, but their presence in North Africa conflicted with a Amazigh/Berber tradition. Berbers slowly converted to Islam, but they resisted the Arabian culture for around eight centuries. When the process of arabising the area was almost entirely achieved, the French colonial presence interfered to reintegrate another European culture. Nationalism came first to show Arabic roots, but later Amazigh tribes raise their voices to enhance the North African not only of an early Punic, Phoenician and Roman influence but mainly of ancient origins.

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The North African desert is an extension of the Middle Eastern one in that it belongs to the same geographical area, which is called the Arab World. The representation of the Sahara in the North African literature in the Arabic tongue is very limited compared to the large wild area it covers.

For instance, in Tunisia, Mahmoud Messaadi's حدث أبو هريرة قال or *Thus Spake Abu Huraira* is one of the well-known texts that deal with the desert. In the twentieth-century the Algerian novelist Abd Alhamid Ben Hedouga, the

[367] Huart, *History*, 10.

Morrocan Mubarak Rabi and the Mauritani Ahmed Weld Abd Elkader share the desert as theme in their works. For them the desert is the source of harshness and evil in their characters. Its elements, like the wind in *Southern Wind,* are the amalgamation of "dark elements" in such a blindingly lighted context.

Nevertheless, the desert remains marginalized in these writers who tend to represent the alien space as the source of evil and its manifestations. *The Changing Names* is, in fact, the unique work that deals with the desert of the precedent century. Indeed the Maghreb's disdain of the desert is shared by almost all the Arab novelists who generally approach it in a unique voice and vision. They deal with the desert as the space, time and narrative structure that opens on the void. Emphasizing the desert-emptiness relationship, the literature exhibits pictures of the frightening huge empty space or nature in its pure immensity without a friend (companion in Sufis terminology). Even the human is perceived as monstrous in a completely alien world that swallows up the wanderers. In his introduction to *Desert Myths*, Bakkar says,

ربما لا يجد الدارس تفسيرا ناجزا لخوف الانسان من الأمكنة الفارغة والمفتوحة إلى ما لا نهاية لكن الحالة موجودة، والتفاسير التي تتحدى لتفسيرها لا تجانب الصواب ولكنها لا تتضمنه جميعه بالضرورة وربما كان اكثر الاسباب حضورا والتصاقا بذات الانسان تلك العداوة المضمرة بين الانسان والمجهول التي يزيدها الجهل بها غيلا في الغموض والالتباس ويكسبها أبعادا حقيقية ولذلك ازدحمت الصحاري التراثية بالمغيلان والجان والاصوات الهاتفة.[368]

[368] Tawfiq Bakkar, "I am Tarikki… Or the Logic of Universal Elements", *Desert Myths*, Alkoni Ibrahim, (Tunis: Dar Aljanub lil Nashr, 2006, 4), "Researchers might not find a prompt explanation to the human fear of empty spaces and their openness on infinity; but this fear exists. In their struggle to explain this condition, interpretations come always close to truth without containing it. One possible explanation is perhaps that Man, confronted with fear, ignorance and hostility vis-a-vis the unknown, his sense of mystery and confusion is further aggravated. Thus, he hives fear the real shapes that people ancient deserts with elves, jinn and chanting voices," [translation mine].

This mystical space filled with monsters, voices, echoes, mythical animals and supernatural powers is the same real space whose windy voice and sunny eye prevail in the Arabic texts that make of heat the primordial cause of death and disaster. The sun is the enemy who can make wanderers suffer to death with the sand filling their mouths. The sun is heat which is, in its turn, the fiery major component of hells. The sun, sand and wind are the trinity of the desert as depicted in the Arabic literature, in particular way the Maghrebian one. Indeed, apart from the prophets of the three monolithic religions and mainly before the historical arabizing process, the Maghrebian desert was the cradle of the Berber civilization whose deity (mainly Tanit) exists in folklore till the present time. The saints are part of the present everyday life of their disciples, who testify for their sacredness. Gharbi's words highlight this idea,

وبالرغم من قلة المؤلفين الغربيين الذين تناولوا دراسة أبناء الصحراء بصدق ومنهجية بسبب م استقر في نفوسهم من الارث الاستعماري الطويل عن خطورة أبناء الصحراء وتخلفهم ودونيتهم الحضارية فقد تعددت المؤلفات التي مجدت الصحراء وعظمتها ومجدت جاذبيتها الساحرة الفاتنة للانسان... فهي الحرية المجسدة والخالدة والمحاربون الأباة المتمردون أيدا يملؤون المدى الأوسع... وحتى الموت يختارونه وفق خيالهم ووهمهم اللامتناهيين انها الحقل الفسيح للخيالي الوهمي من تصوراتنا. فالتآلف بين هذا المكان وهذا الانسان يموت دوما ودوما يستعيد حياته ويبدؤها من جديد [369]

The desert as mythical in time and stories, as Gharbi agrees, is a central characteristic in Alkoni's novels. On the other hand, the twentieth century Arabian literature on the desert presents it in different ways. The Middle Eastern writer who gave the Sahara its important dimension in his novels and who can be compared to Ibrahim Alkoni is Abed Arrahman Munif.

[369] Gharbi, Shift, 7, "In spite of the fact that very few Western writers on desert people were objective because of their long colonial heritage that portrayed these populations as dangerous, under-developed and uncivilized; many texts glorified deserts' greatness, magnetism, magic and fascination… it embodies eternal freedom and tells about its historical rebel warriors… even death is depicted in a fantastic way. The desert is the immense space where our fantasy create infinite illusions. Man's harmony with this space dies, resurrects and lives *ad infinitum*," [translation mine].

Desert cities are best epitomized by Munif in his quintet *Mudun Al Melh* or *Salt Cities*. The cities seem to be alien to the weather of the desert. For example, massive rain, characteristic of the desert, destroys any trial to amalgamate and form cities. Indeed the natural/traditional alternative for the urban cities would be the oasis. In the second half of the previous century, the form of the Western urbanism contaminated the desert. Munif speaks of desert cities, the politics of the desert in its encounter in clash with the west. He gave virtual names to his cities to express what he calls "oil civilization and the politics of stealing"[370]

The quintet is centred on these cities "Haran and Muran," whose depiction continues throughout the pages of five novels. He says:

ومورات مدينة عجيبة ، انها تشبه الصحراء بكل تفاصيلها وأخلاقها او بالاحرى تلخصها.
فهي قادرة على استقبال كل شيء وهضم كل شيء تماما مثل النعام [371]

He follows the growth of his cities step by step also alluding to his texts. In his *A World without Maps*, a novel shared with Jabara Ibrahim Jabra, where Amourya is the epitome of oil desert cities,

" أكبر مدينة مشوهة في العالم إنها تشبه كل المدن و لا تشبه أية مدينـة"

"مثل تلك العروس القروية لم تحتفظ بالماضي ولا استطاعت أن تدخل المستقبل"
" طبعا للنفط اثره العميق اكتشفه الامريكيون وعلموا الناس الخطيئة، بل الخطايا السبع كلها" [372]

Munif, is widely recognized by the Arab scholars in the Arab world by studying the political influence that radically changed the desert. So far

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[370] Gharbi, Shift, 176.

[371] Munif Abdul Rahman, *Mudun al-milh 5: Badiyyat athulumat*, (*Salt Cities 5: The Trench*), (Beirut: al-Muassasa al-Arabiyya lid-Dirasat wan-Nashr Books, 1989), 499, "Muran is a wonder city, it resembles the desert in its elements and its ethics. It simply summarizes it. It is able to host and integrate anything", [translation mine].

[372] Munif Abdul Rahman & Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *Alam bi-la kharait*, (*A World without Maps*) (Beirut: al-Muassasa al-Arabiyya lid-Dirasat wan-Nashr, 1982), 81-4, "it is the most ruined city in the world. It resembles all cities and different from any", "like a village bride, it neither preserves her past, nor firmly steps into the future", "For sure, oil has a deep effect on the desert. Americans discovered it and taught people to sin. No! They taught them the seven sins", [translation mine].

Munif's is rather a complete work on the past/present of the desert people, Arabian-westernized cities, Bedouin's and hybrid identities; in short, his scope is rather the actual political, social and economic recreation of the desert that endures to external violence and internal betrayal. His cities of Muran and Haran are expanded and divided into the "Arabian Haran" and the "American Haran." Munif's *Salt Cities* is also a story of a place that is divided after the foreigner comes in. A desert map, different from T. E. Lawrence's, emerges to the eye of the Bedouin as a lost heritage and authenticity.

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Apart from Munif and Alkoni, the theme of the Arabic novel has been for long dominated by stories of cities. One of Alkoni's critics and translators, Elliott Colla, argues that Alkoni's desert remained unfamiliar to most "Arab readers;" for the novel has been mostly centred on the city. He confirms our belief in that "Aside from the work of novelists such as Abderahman Munif and Miral al-Thawy, the nomadic segment of Arab society—once so economically and politically significant that it inspired Ibn Khaldun's classic—has been largely absent from the Arab novelistic imagination."[373]

Indeed, the desert remained marginalised until modern Arabic writers thought of digging into their tradition of writing and look for their identity where the desert had been an ancestral theme specific to their land and history. These writers faced the difficulty to find in the classical European theories of the novel what can express the concepts of the circularity of time, timelessness, poly-central space, tribal identity, the eradication of the past, the present as a yearning to a lost and desired past, the space as continual mimicry of the lost paradise, law as summed aphorisms, and knowledge as nature. Thus, the Western definition of fiction has to be reviewed to answer

[373] Alkoni, *GD*, 165-6.

these characteristics of the desert, a fact that drives critics, like Said Ghanemi[374], to admit a new art of writing in Alkoni.

The flexibility of the Western form of the novel that underwent technical and stylistic changes by travelling from one continent to another, the genre continues to redefine itself *ad infinitum*. This allows Arabic novelists to adopt different techniques by adapting the genre to new recreations, through a deep scrutiny of space studies, people's collective experience and identity. While Abd Arrahman Munif writes on the Arabian Desert and its social, economic and landscape changes, Ibrahim Alkoni in his extensive fictional work on the North African desert deals with the mythical aspect of the desert. They cover two different areas of the desert and they deal with their themes in completely different ways.

Despite a full awareness of Alkoni's long novels, like *The Animists, The Maggie, The Well, Night Herb* etc., three short novels were selected for analysis; these fall into two different periods of the writer's career: the late decade of the twentieth-century, which represents his mid-career, and the first decade of the twenty-first century. Thus, *The Bleeding of the Stone* and *Gold Dust* are written in the early 1990s and *Anubis* in 2005. This choice is explained by the desire to trace the different magical elements in Alkoni's literature in these two decades and observe his maturation in the quest towards the construction of a literary identity. In fact, by seeking magical/mythical realist elements in Alkoni's novels, we can perhaps answer the urgent need of an alternative genre that fits to the different realism in the desert.

[374] Said Ghanemi, *Malhamat Al-Houdud Al-Kuswa: Al-Mikyal As-Sahrawi Fi Adab Ibrahim Al-Koni*, (*Epic Ceilings: the Desert Imaginary in Ibrahim Alkoni's literature*), (Casablanca: The Arab Cultural Center, 2000), [translation mine].

The main purpose of this chapter is to examine Ibrahim Alkoni's quest in the twentieth-and-twenty-first-century North African desert. Ibrahim Alkoni, as the spokesperson of Berbers' collective identity and imaginary, articulates the stories of the tribes' origins and founding fathers. His novels enshrine the places, events, and rituals that constitute a unique and collective experience of the tribes' shared imaginary and in doing so; he lays out the bonds that mark the tribes' identity and distinguish them from other societies. Based on the importance of myth in the North African desert novels by Alkoni and their relationship to magical/mythical realism and cultural identity, the main idea is to demonstrate how the recreation of myth delineates and transmits a specific cultural identity, directly related to its historical and cultural context.

Although Ibrahim Alkoni is one of the greatest North African writers in the complexity and richness of his style, his novels started to gain the attention of critics only late. Only few books are published on his fiction and, so far, no study has been devoted to mythology in his work. Said Ghanemi writes *Epic Ceilings: Desert imaginary in the literature of Ibrahim Alkoni,* in which an anthropological treatise centres on desert economy and culture and uses Alkoni's novels as a literary reference. In Amina Branin's book *The Space of Desert in the Arabic Novel*[375], the writer offers a treatment of the theory of space and applies it on Alkoni's novel *The Animists*. Walid ben Hmed Althihly writes *The Aesthetics of the Desert in the Arabic Novel*[376] to look for the aesthetic of Alkoni's desert in his novel *The Animists*. Margaret Obank's[377] "Anubis a Desert Novel by Ibrahim al-Koni" gives a short analysis of *Anubis*.

[375] Branin, *The Space,* [translation mine].

[376] Walid ben Hmed Althihly, *Jamaliyyat Assahra fi al-Adab al-Arabi, The Aesthetics of the Desert in the Arabic Novel*, (Jordan: Dar Jarir, 2013), [translation mine].

[377] Margaret Obank, *Anubis: A Desert Novel by Ibrahim al-Koni*, Trans. William M Hutchins. (AUC Press: Cairo, 2005), <http://www.banipal.co.uk/book_reviews/8/anubis-a-desert-novel-by-ibrahim-al-koni/>.

Alkoni's translators such as William M. Hutchins[378] and Elliott Culler write short introductions to the novels they worked on. Finally, Susan Mchugh[379] presents an extensive article entitled "Hybrid Species and Literatures: Ibrahim al-Koni's 'Composite Apparition'" that is illuminating to the different themes of the text. Nevertheless, no one of these critics deals with the postcolonial magical/mythical realist mode in Alkoni's novels, and few references were made to Berber identity construction.

A number of his novels are translated into English: *Anubis: A Desert Novel*, *The Seven Veils of Seth* and *The Puppet* were translated by William M. Hutchins, *Gold Dust* and *The Animists* by Elliott Colla, *The Bleeding of the Stone* by May Jayyusi and Christopher Tingley. This work takes into consideration mainly three novels for which an English translation is available: *Anubis: A Desert Novel*, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, and *Gold Dust* besides referring to other Arabic works of his.

The way Alkoni portrays the native spirit hovering on the desert landscape of modern Libya offers an original view of Libyan identity. This idea runs through the pages of Alkoni's literature as a critical and problematic mirror of a complex reality in the present day.

In this section, the North African desert is explored from a native perspective, in the selected writings of Ibrahim Alkoni. Alkoni's quest for the North African Berber identity can be read from the magical/mythical realist mode of writing. In fact, magical realism opens the classical definition of realism on the notions of difference and plurality; which makes it possible for the ethnic groups and minorities to recreate their cultural identities. It is

[378]Ibrahim Alkoni, *Anubis: a Desert Novel*, (2002), Tr. William M. Hutchins, (The American University Press: Cairo, 2005).

[379] Mchugh, Susan. "Hybrid Species and Literatures: Ibrahim al-Koni's 'Composite Apparition'", Comparative Critical Studies, (Edinburgh University Press: 2012), www. Eupjournals.com,<http://www.une.edu/people/susan-mchugh>.

useful, however, to define magical realism as the mode that helped shaping the cultural identity of many non-European realist novels. The aim of the following analysis is to pinpoint the native vein in Alkoni's treatment of the North African space and to underline his cultural background and techniques of writing, to which the argument is leading to. The theme is the desert, the language is Arabic, the style is universal, but the populations that are under investigation are Berber/Amazigh. It is important, also, to delineate the particularity of the novelist's aesthetics and whether he introduces innovative techniques. In this respect, the questions are: how can Alkoni's texts be magical realist? How this mode does facilitate the writer's aims? What is the goal hindering behind novel writing? What is magical realism? How are Alkoni's novels important in the mythical identity construction? How do Alkoni's characters venerate the desert?

Before the theoretical introduction, a short historical sketch of the twentieth-century Berber Libyan literature is outlined. Once the setting is framed, Ibrahim Alkoni's biography and works are brought to light in a brief presentation.

Before engaging in a thorough study of the relationship between the recreation of myth and its relation to identity, it is important to clarify the contemporary critical view, often undecidable, about magic realism as a property of Latin American literature. In the light of the first approaches to the genre as presented by earlier writers as Carpentier[380] and the recent publications of such authors as Wendy B. Faris[381], it is important to study the terms "magical" and "exotic" as the attributes that correspond to the

[380]Alejo Carpentier, "On the Marvelous Real in America." (1949) in Zamora, Lois Parkinson et Faris, Wendy B., *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995).

[381]Faris Wendy B., *Ordinary Enchantments, Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004).

Western vision of the North African reality. First, a theoretical framing of the present part has the objective to define postcolonial magical realism and to depict the way myth is considered the focal concept in Alkoni's texts that engage in this literary genre to achieve his quest in the North African desert.

The main objective of this part will therefore be to show how myth is currently reconstructed in the heart of magic realist novels and how these contribute to the search for identity and the preservation of cultural heritage in Alkoni's novels.

In chapter II, after an introduction to the magical realist genre and a definition of myth, there follows a literary and cultural attempt to read Alkoni's novels from a mythical realist perspective and to show how this realises the writer's literary quest towards a North African identity. We will also show scrutinise the way "mythical realism" plays a major role in the writer's effort in the reconstruction and rediscovery of a native Berber identity. This section centres on the idea of the desert as the protagonist in Alkoni's novels. The writer's experimentations on space establish the North African myth; hence, writing becomes the journey towards the past in a continual ritual of initiation or the protagonists' physical connection to nature in a myth of continual return (based on Mircea Eliade's concept of the creation myth).

After describing the features of magical realism in Alkoni's novels, the second chapter deals with the narrative techniques employed in these novels and the numerous references to orality, which is a major expression of cultural identity. Then the analysis dwells on how Berber novels, caught between a certain traditional "orality" and writing, represent a fluctuation between "the language of myth" and "the language of the novel" as means to enhance identity. Considering the differences between telling a story and

depicting myth in its continual return, Alkoni's works can be categorised as mythical novels, as reservoirs of cultural heritage of the North African desert. All this is possible through the analysis of mythical realism in the novels and its relation to the North African identity. In *Anubis*, there is the possibility to study the origins of desert people. The analysis focuses on the way Alkoni proposes a mythical realist reconstruction of the North African culture.

In chapter III and as way to conclude, the aesthetic of the desert in Alkoni is studied from a postcolonial magical realist perspective that shows the desert in the idea of "Myth as filling the void." The elements of post-colonialism are put forward. The study is concluded by highlighting how the magic realist novels of Alkoni are of crucial importance in establishing a sense of community and an inalienable part of culture and identity. At this level, the North African novel opens the gate for new historical, cultural and literary dimensions that contribute to the developing awareness of the particular North African identity.

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The desert is the poetic space that is given an amplified dimension in Alkoni's texts.[382] Alkoni's desert is not governed by ownership laws, unlike other spaces. The void hides the secrets that jungles and big cities cannot shelter.[383] The desert is one of those marginalised spaces, where people of a stereotyped "bedouism" lived on the edge of the European civilisation; and so it is conceived primitive and out of history. After colonisation and the era of oil-discovery, the desert is moved from the margin to the centre of attention and observation. The literature on the desert finds in the

[382] Bachelard, *Poetique*, 184.

[383] Alkoni, *Animists*, 46.

postcolonial discourse, in the magical/mythical modes and in the animist approaches the vehicle to depict its complex realism.

In postcolonial magical realism, space is open to the interactions of diversity. Spaces, like the desert, are often given a cultural identity to put the reader into the condition to question accepted conventions and excavating forms of being that have been undermined in Eurocentric realist narratives. In the present analysis, the space in question is filled with the Berber indigenous spirit, ancestral stories, *jinn* apparitions and mythical wars between mountains and plains; all is meant to reconstruct an identity specific to the North African desert. Alkoni's novels play a critical role that mirrors a problematic reality. Thus, admitting the importance of the historical treatment of the writer's space, the following part is a brief presentation of Alkoni's origins and cultures that will allow the focalisation on the context of Ibrahim Alkoni's novels.

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What is highlighted, in this section, is the difference between Berber and Arabic that leads to an enjoyable cultural and literary richness in North Africa. In this respect, it is important to distinguish the Berber literature that is written in Arabic from the North African one written in and identified as Arabic and from the one written in French and identified as francophone literature. In any of these cases, North African literature has a story born from the encounter of three contexts totally different and until around 1960 almost completely unknown to one another: the Arab, the Berber and the European. However, it was an encounter between unequal forces.

With the expansion of Arabia and the conquests that followed, the human and social reality of the North African space passed through a series of changes that overshadowed the region and its cultures. The Arabs and the

Europeans enjoyed any decision-making power over the Berber natives, mainly in imposing their languages on them. For long centuries and until the present day the Arabic language has been imposed as the only means to communicate, by which literature has been imagined and recreated. Alkoni's novels are acts to "unearth" the pre-Arabic culture.[384]

This work brings to light a culture "veiled" by dominant powers, through memory and imagination of one of the greatest contemporary Libyan writers, whose universal culture introduces the rest of the world to the North African desert. Alkoni was born in 1948 in the Fezzan Region. He was brought up in the tradition of the Tuareg, popularly known as "the veiled men" or "the blue men." Mythological elements, spiritual quest and existential questions mingle in the writings of Alkoni who has been hailed as "magical realist, Sufi fabulist and poetic novelist"[385].

He spent his childhood in the desert and learnt the Arabic language when he was eleven. Alkoni studied comparative literature at the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute in Moscow and then worked as a journalist in Moscow and Warsaw. By 2007, Alkoni published more than 80 books and received numerous awards. His books, all written in Arabic, have been translated into thirty-five languages.

In Moscow, Alkoni learnt Russian, worked as a journalist, studied philosophy and comparative literature at the Maxim Gorky Institute with a Masters of Arts in 1977. In Russia, Alkoni accessed most of his Western knowledge.

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[384] For further information see, "Rapport général Sur La situation des droits humains des Imazighen de Libye," La fondation Tawalt, (Nations Unies: 2007), 2, <http://berberi.org/Documenti/tawalt_fr2.pdf.> "La libye est pays arabe. Quiconque prétend le contraire et se revendique non arabe n a qu'a quiter le pays," (Kadafi Discours prononcé le 7 octobre 2007). In this document presented by the Tawalt foundation to the human rights comity tells of Gheddafi's oppressive regime towards the Libyan Berber populations, he invites Berbers to leave the country if they resist to their arabisation, forbidding them of giving Berber names to their children and to speak their language

[385] Ibrahim Alkoni, "International Prize for Arabic Fiction", <http://www.arabicfiction.org/author/40.html> (04/06/2012, 14:00).

In Poland, Alkoni lived until 1994, when he moved to Switzerland, to live until the present. Alkoni received a number of literary awards that acknowledged his success.

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As a Tuareg, Alkoni is possibly a 'post-colonial' subject who has a plurality of insularities imposed on his persona or identity. He is Tuareg, thus a member of a nomadic linguistic, ethnic, and racial rapidly diminishing minority group. The Tuareg has limited socio-political organisation and representation. They are particularly marginalised and rendered an insignificant peripheral group. Though not exclusively a Tuareg phenomenon, nomadism is an important feature of their identity. They do not have a fixed location but one that spans the entire Sahara desert from Libya up to Morocco, and beyond all through Africa, enjoying an absolute freedom of movement and autonomy. Though scatterings of sedentary communities are acknowledged, the Tuareg have always associated fixed abode with serfdom.[386]

The desert is a symbol of freedom that reassures Berbers of their mastery over a space that they strive to dominate and monopolise. Their desert simply creates conditions of bare material complications. It is a desert of no enclosures and apparently boundless freedom. Their possession of the desert they inhabit, a space not enclosed by recent 'nation-state' constructs, becomes a feature of their identity. They perceive themselves to be the sole rulers of the desert. The South Mediterranean cities are mostly dominated

[386] Alkoni, *Anubis*, xxi.

by Arabs; but, in the Great Sahara, already pushed away from the coasts by Romans, the masked Tuareg are real rulers of the desert.[387]

Berber stories are transmitted orally from one generation to the other; they include a series of accounts and myths that they reshaped according to power relations. Much of the Tuaregs' functional imperative revolves around their mastery of the desert. They are providers of safety of passage within the region that depended exclusively on monopolising the available resources. Naturally, they controlled slave and salt trade and the commercial trajectories towards Africa, Asia and Europe.

The origin of Tuareg is discussed by many anthropologists and historians; the common belief is that they have European origins.[388] In fact, in Arabic, *tawaruk* has its roots ascribed to mean 'abandoned'. Myths about battles, miracles, magic, identity, and desert secrets, orally transmitted to Alkoni offer him the first material to write.

Tuareg mythology is rich. Much of this mythology accentuates their assumed genealogy and heroic acts in the light of foreign incursions and conflict. It ascribes a specific class stratification and social order. It also reveals the influences to which they became exposed and their hopes and aspirations, as well as their disappointments, recorded as history. For example, Tin Hinan, considered the maternal ancestor of all the noble tribes, and the first mother and first queen, is closely associated with Tuareg history and continues to be the source of life for its people. Another example, diverse versions of the Cain and Abel story exist in Tuareg mythology that could reflect either their value of kinship or some similar story to which they can

[387] Amazigh, Berbères official website, <http://tuaregs.online.fr/touareg_f/pages/definitions/puredefs/berbere.htm> (18/12/2014, 11:38).

[388] Unesco, *Libya Antiqua*, (Paris: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1986), 51.

relate. They believe that an inscription found in a remote desert area of the famous Koranic text is a talisman endowed with mystical meaning and supernatural power.[389]

Berbers' survival in the desert is, in fact, based on the interpretation of signs. Their belief in magic and miracles, including the ability of humans to transform and become immortal; retelling of their past, legends, and beliefs is continual. These myths and their transmission are important in inseminating a particular self-image and identity. Berbers' interpretations of time and space are different from modern ones. Their interpretation of reality and history depends on the sayings and aphorisms that they inherited from their ancestors as clues that they are given to decipher the complex sign-systems.

Alkoni is a Libyan citizen. He was born in the Libyan Fezzan region, where he was acquainted to sedentary life though in a desert environment heavily dependent on nomadic circulation and exchange within the range of predominantly European influence. Alkoni was also exposed to the ideology of self-imposed exile that is personified by the *Senussiyya*[390] order that later ruled Libya up to 1969, and that was close to his own desert Tuareg world. Alkoni appears to be influenced by this order and its doctrine of self-imposed exile, although the Tuareg also had similar segregation as a means of preservation of identity.[391]

Alkoni knows Islam as amalgamation of various African and Middle Eastern beliefs, a reshaped monolithic religion into a different Sufi and Pagan

[389]Ibrahim Alkoni, Interv. Aljazeera. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5j4Z6Dy62A&index=4&list=PLFE9803A4E0387C7D> (30/10/2014, 13:22).

[390] For further information see, Sanussi official website, <http://www.senussiyafoundation.it/senussiya> (18/12/2014, 12:07).

[391]Ibrahim Alkoni, Interv. in <www.youtube.com.watch?v=K8sMbKQ-HEE> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5j4Z6Dy62A > (30/10/2014, 13:22).

interpretations of Islam. Such beliefs are perhaps a synthesis of animist and magical beliefs through the influences that came from sub-Saharan Africa.[392]

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Before dealing with Alkoni's quest for identity in his North African desert, a brief summary of the selected novels is important to help understand the analysis of his magical realist oeuvre. Harmony between man and nature in the desert is a central idea in Alkoni's thought. As Said Ghanemi explains, in his *Epic Ceilings,* the economic system of the desert is based on "the economy of the necessary", meaning that desert people focus on what is essential to survive. Instead, settled societies strive to be in control and live in luxury as a sign of civilisation and supremacy.[393] This is how Ghanemi explains Alkoni's warning of introducing gold or black gold into the economy of the desert.

In this context, *Gold Dust* (1990) shows how materialism threatens the old intonation between the desert and its people. The story takes place in Ghadames, in Libya, and begins when a kind of friendship relates Ukhayyad to his Mahri camel or piebald "Ablaq." This Mahri has a serious skin illness that threatens his life and is caused by his lavish sexuality. One of the elders, Sheikh Musa, advices Ukhayyad to give Ablaq a desert magical herb: Assiyar[394]. There is one condition; Ablaq needs to be vasectomised.

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[392] Katherine E. Hoffman, *We Share Walls: Language, Land, and Gender in Berber Morocco*, (Blackwell, 2008), 168.

[393] Ghanemi, *Epic*, 21-25, [translation mine].

[394] Alkoni, *GD*, 169-170. Eliott Colla defines the herb in his translator's afterwards: "the long extinct *silphium* (of the genus *Ferula*) was an herb known since the Greek colonisation of Libya and used in Roman cooking. Thought to be a giant fennel, the herb was praised for its savory taste, and also as an abortofacient. In any case so valuable the herb that it figured on the coins of Roman Libya. *Silphium* achieved a near mythical status in antiquity when, either due to overharvesting or climate change, it disappeared from the narrow strip of Cyrenaica where it grew."

In a moment of craze, during the fight with Assiyar and illness, Ablaq loses his own control and starts to run out into the desert in a mythical act to leave his own deteriorated skin. Ukhayyad fears losing him forever, ties himself to the Mahri that drags him over until he loses his skin too. During the journey towards rebirth, they alternatively lose their physical and mental capacities and they save each other's life. Their blood mixes up and they swear brotherly unity.

As Ghanemi asserts, the economy of the desert is based on sacrifices and offerings; this is to explain how Ukhayyad promises a solemn sacrifice to the Goddess Tanit; by breaking his oath, he brings his own downfall.[395] That starts when an outsider comes to his tribe and Ukhayyad, who is promised to his cousin for marriage, decides to abdicate to marry the outsider. That causes his banishment from his land and his father's anger. It is when he moves to the oasis and chooses the new way of life that calamities come one after the other. As soon as he and his wife and child settle down in the oasis, the Italian war reaches it and they face famine. He is forced to mortgage Ablaq to his wife's cousin Dodo. Dodo had intention to marry his cousin before Ukhayyad. However, Ablaq tries incessantly to escape from Dodo. This latter is unhappy with Ablaq's resistance, asks Ukhayyad to leave his wife and gets back his camel. When Ukhayyad accepts, Dodo gives him a handful of gold dust. Therefore, people start to talk of the man who sold his wife and son for gold. On the wedding night, Ukhayyad finds Dodo and kills him tossing him with the gold dust he gave him. Then Dodo's family looks for him and kills him tying him to two camels walking in two different directions.

[395] Alkoni, *GD*, 48.

Death in Alkoni's stories haunts the protagonists for the periled path they choose. In *Gold Dust*, Ukhayyad is killed more than once. He is out of his sect when he disobeys Tanit. Therefore, he is banished when he rebelled against his tribe and father's laws. He loses his dignity when he gave away his wife and son for gold dust. He loses everything with Ablaq's capture by Dodo's family. His death was expected from the start. The protagonist has to die also in *The Bleeding of the Stone*; because the real protagonist is the desert.

The Bleeding of the Stone (1990) is about Assouf a young Bedouin who lives in the desert herding animals and guiding tourists to see ancient rocks. In Fezzan-Libya, Assouf has a particular spiritual relationship with an animal called Waddan, which is said to be the oldest animal in the Sahara and is hence associated to local mythology and sacred rituals. "The waddan, or moufflon, a kind of wild mountain sheep, is the oldest animal in the Sahara. It became extinct in Europe as early as the seventeenth century."[396] Since only Assouf knows exactly where the Waddan is found, two ruthless hunters, who have already slaughtered so many gazelles, ask him to find the Waddan. This is another desert novel that shows how the relationship between man and nature is affected by sacredness and spirituality. It is dealt with as an extension of the world of spirits. It is part of people's *being* that is revealed in their behaviour. In *The Bleeding of the Stone,* elements of physical space are focused on. The desert is a space of extremes or ceilings as Ghanemi says: draught no rain for years and then when it rains it floods the space away. The narrator speaks Assouf's mind: "no sooner has the rain poured the waters flowed to every corner, then the cruel, gloomy, draught stricken land

[396] Alkoni, *BS*, 136.

had returned green with plants of a thousand kinds. They simply sprang up, and the dull, dried-up trees turned green in a few days."[397]

On the one hand, the choice to live in the desert can have a romantic explanation. Assouf's father chooses to live in the desert because he finds relief in nature, he feels sheltered from human captivity in one place (mainly to avoid the desert opposite: the oasis[398]) and he seeks security and refuge in nature. At times, Assouf identifies "his father in the eyes of the great, patient Waddan. The sad benevolent eyes of his father, who'd never understood why man should harm his brother man, who'd fled to the desert, choosing to die alone in the mountains rather than return to men."[399] The son follows his father's footsteps. Disappointed by the evil in the world of materialism, he wanders in his sheltering desert. On life in the desert Eliott Colla comments

> Alkoni's novels take place in a desert world that is, despite its desolation, surprisingly rich in the sense that everywhere there are living beings struggling to live. In Alkoni's fiction the meaning of life is always tied to struggle. Thus Alkoni's novels paradoxically suggest that only here… in the harshest corners of the desert waste… does life emerge in its richest sense.[400]

Assouf whispered a solemn oath to Waddan, who saved his life, not to hunt him and his offspring. He is also transformed into Waddan when the Italian coloniser seized him; which helped him to escape. Assouf is reborn when he is adopted by a mythical and sacred father the *waddan*. [401] *Waddan* is

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[397] Alkoni, *BS*, 70.

[398] The oasis is considered the desert alternative of the urban city. Tuareg Berbers are nomads. For them settling down for more than forty days in the same place is dangerous for their nomadic spirit. Nevertheless other Berber populations either never converted to nomadism or settled down at a certain time in the oases or in Northern towns and villages.

[399] Alkoni, *BS*, 61.

[400] Alkoni, *GD*, 165.

[401] Durand Gilbert, *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*, (Dunod: Paris, 1960), 284.

presented by Alkoni in the notes of the novel as a sacred creature. It is an important animal for the Touareg populations. In Tassili paintings[402], Henri Lhote notes how moufflon or *waddan* plays a central role in the ancient population's creeds. The cave-paintings show representations of a glorified huge *waddan* […]. Hunting moufflon has also many complex rituals, like putting a heavy rock or a *waddan* mask on the hunters' heads, singing specific magical verses and keeping the hunt secret to avoid *jinns*' anger.[403] Assouf's real father "had become wary of hunting the *waddan*, and would never venture to the majestic heights until he'd recited all the Koranic verses he'd memorized, repeated, in Hausa, all the spells of the African magicians, then hung around his neck all the snakeskin amulets he'd bought from soothsayers traveling in caravans from Kano."[404]

In the desert, "only through dust will the son of Adam be filled," and Cain lurks his human-brother in the desert.

> Before [he could have arms], he'd hunted one gazelle in a raid, two if he was lucky. Now the situation was reversed he could slaughter the whole herd in a single raid, with just one or two gazelles escaping if luck smiled on them. As the number of slain animals grew, so did the amount of meat he ate. He'd breakfast on one gazelle, lunch on another and have a third for his supper, with still one more if he happened to have a guest, some passing herdsman, perhaps, or a merchant from a caravan.[405]

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[402] Tassili n'Ajjer Located in a strange lunar landscape of great geological interest, this site has one of the most important groupings of prehistoric cave art in the world. More than 15,000 drawings and engravings record the climatic changes, the animal migrations and the evolution of human life on the edge of the Sahara from 6000 BC to the first centuries of the present era. The geological formations are of outstanding scenic interest, with eroded sandstones forming 'forests of rock', <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/179>.

[403] Henri Lhote. *The Search for the Tassili Frescoes: The story of the prehistoric rock-paintings of the Sahara*, (London, 1973), 154.

[404] Alkoni, *BS*, 23.

[405] Alkoni, *BS*, 90.

Cain, the obsessive meat-eater, crucifixes Assouf on the Ancient rock that this latter had devoted all his life to preserve. This novel informs us of ancestral rituals of birth and death in terms of "change and renewal" in Alkoni's desert. These monuments are like the eyes of the desert; they see all and they tell the following generations about who passed from there. Like these monuments, the desert is peopled by many figures and myths.

Anubis (2005) is a particular novel of Alkoni, in its drawing on a mythical approach to time in plot and structure. The main character, Anubi, borrows his name from ancient Egyptian mythology; in this interpretation Anubi is also the son of an unknown father that he searches wandering in the desert. He does not find his father, but he discovers his longing to wilderness and solitude. He also explores his identity and the one of the people after. In his introduction to the book, William Hutchins describes how the Tuareg legendary hero Anubi is presented as the ancient god. The story can be summarised in few lines, because its events echo the three phases of a human life: youth, adult and elderly. Anubi at a certain age comes to the sudden awareness that he never really saw his father. He sets himself on a journey to meet his unknown father: that covers part one of the novel and ends by Anubi killing a priest who declares himself responsible of Anubi's mother's death. In part two, Anubi submits to a physical mutation that enables him to run across the arid space as swift as an arrow. He has animal features but a human mind. He embraces his mythical attires and accepts his superhuman and super-animal powers. Then he learns that the priest he had slaughtered was his own father. At that moment a half-woman and half-*jinn* tells him "the truth". He marries her and has offspring. Then he discovers she is his own sister, while he becomes head of his tribe. He builds the eternal temple around his statue. Then he loses everything to restart his wandering into the desert, this time in search for 'solitude'. In his contemplating exile,

Anubi meets his son who quests for him, the father, and to reconstruct his identity. By the end of part three, Anubi is slaughtered by his son.

These rules or philosophy of desert life seem to be eternal as they have no author, place and time. In the introduction to the book, Hutchins believes that Alkoni translated Anubi's story from his Berber tellers to the Arabic tongue, after his long journey in south Libya and Mali. This explains the origins of the story that focuses on the quest for identity and the belonging to the lost oasis "Targa", from which the name Tuareg is believed to be borrowed. In *Anubis*, the desert is peopled by spectres, *jinns*, humans, gods and animals. What is noticeable about these characters is that they can change or mix *being*, they can metamorphose into animal or semi-animal or can acquire super-human powers. The whole story is about a Tuareg man's complex story. He can be said the founding father of the tribe, or he is symbolically the father of humanity in general. As a mythical "hero," he tries to defeat an aphorism that "absence is the destiny of fathers". His life is a story of initial abandonment of the laws of both the tribe and the desert, leading to suffering and punishment by the elements of the desert. Then the reconciliation with the laws of the desert happens when he becomes a benign ruler and leader himself. But he yearns for wandering and prefers "solitude." At the same time, his son starts to follow his same path of searching for the father.

Solitude is another theme in the novel. All along his life, Anubi is facing, admitting, rejecting and needing solitude. Solitude functions as the magnetic power or the spirit of the desert and may be interpreted as the perception of the desert. It is a complete disremembering of one's past. It is a rite of rebirth and renewal. It is the magic effect of the desert on the traveller's psyche. The Panibal writer, Margaret Obank, summarises the themes of the novel in

> The desert setting is Alkoni's strength: its expanse, desolation and mystery is powerfully evoked, particularly in the passage where Anubis gets lost and nearly dies, saving himself by drinking what he discovers afterwards is the urine of a gazelle. His life wandering in the desert and living in the desert oasis is at once a personal story, the legend of god-like mythical hero, a mystical tale of demons, dreams and metamorphosis, as well as parable of human civilisation, and more particularly of the urban life that encroaches on the traditions of the desert.[406]

These eccentric elements of the "desert novel" show the importance of myth in the study of space, of which Alkoni uses specific language of the collective imaginary. In this prospect, a clear demarcation is set between "desert novel" and "city novel." To Alkoni[407], Ghanemi[408], Obank, Thehli[409] and Branin[410], desert novel should speak the ethics and the needs of the space through fusing with myth in order to sort out the true identity of its people. But in the novel, the idea of timelessness and infinity is encapsulated in a story that has a start and an end. Ghanemi announces that[411]

> وليس من شك في أن هذه المزاوجة تعني في آخر الأمر نوعا أدبيا جديدا، ليس بالرواية الخالصة، ولا الأسطورة الخالصة، نوعا يمكن أن نطلق عليه بحق: ملحمة الزمان الدوري.

Ghanemi calls by epic what this work analyses from a magical realist perspective. In the following pages, I will try to define magical realism and endeavour to adapt it to the North African Desert novel.

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[406] Obank. *Anubis,* 184.

[407] Alkoni, *MG*, 122, [translation mine].

[408] Ghanemi, *Epic*, 165, [translation mine].

[409] Walid ben Hmed Althihly, *The Aesthetics of the Desert in the Arabic Novel*, (Dar Jarir: Jordan, 2013), 82, [translation mine].

[410] Branin, *Desert*, 41, [translation mine].

[411] Ghanemi, *Epic*, 165, "there is no doubt that this union gives birth to a new literary genre, which is evidently neither pure novel nor pure myth. We can call it: the epic of circular time." [translation mine].

The magical realist mode and myth

"Human society is the embodiment of changeless laws which the whimsicalities and circumstances of men and women involve and overwrap. The realm of literature is the realm of these accidental manners and humours -a spacious realm; and the true literary artist concerns himself mainly with them."[412] In Ibrahim Alkoni's "spacious realm," the reader faces an interpretation of a highly complex reality that goes beyond the mere duality of fiction versus reality. The literary mode that textualizes Alkoni's literary spaces is the one of magical realism.

Since many critics, such as Elliott Colla, Meinrad Calleja and Susan Mchugh, tell us of the magical realist genre of Ibrahim Alkoni's novels and of the writer as one among the pioneers of this genre in Arabic, it is necessary to study the trilogy[413] from this perspective, mainly because there is no full-fledged work on this issue, as far as we know. Magical realism associated with postcolonial writing (mainly the Latin American) is compared to all the 'exotic' connotations of the word. Before studying Alkoni's novels, and considering the writer's global training, it is necessary to define magical realism in order to show how Alkoni's work goes beyond the mere exotic considerations of the North African desert to include, among others, the issue of recreating desert people's identities.

At least from the brief summary of the trilogy, the supernatural phenomena prevailing on the natural space of Alkoni's novels agree with the way magical realism is defined. The concept of literary realism is a European invention

[412] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, (Great Britain: Wordsworth Editions, 2010), 90.

[413] "A series or group of three plays, novels, operas, etc., that, although individually complete, are closely related in theme, sequence, or the like", <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/trilogy>.

that often deals with a Western reality.[414] However, the idea of reality seems to be a unique vision with which any different reality is at odds. The Sub-Saharan African, the Latin American, the Native American, the Native Australian, and the North African literary cultures are similar in sharing the features that the following critics, theorists and novelists call magic realisms. At this level, the main idea is to provide a brief definition of the magical realist novel and see how Alkoni's work fits this categorisation. In fact, *magic realism*[415] seems to be an umbrella term that covers the literary voices from many regions of the world and not only the Latin American area.

The major critics who defined the concept of magical realism are: Carpentier, Flores[416], and others, each presenting his own reflection on it, adding, consequently, to the confusion and ambiguity already inherent to the term since its first apparition.[417] In 1948, Carpentier drew attention to the differences between magical realism and marvellous realism, in his definition of the concept. He talks of his visit to Haiti and his discovery of "lo real maravilloso," a term and concept that he devises to describe a uniquely Latin American form of magical realism. Dwelling in the realm of such tales about the region Carpentier declares that "the phenomenon of the marvellous" is specific to Latin American texts.[418]

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[414] For further information see, Matthew Beaumont, A Concise Companion to Realism, <https://books.google.co.uk> (18/12/2014, 13:55), 2012 "Close resemblance to what is real; fidelity of representation, rendering the precise details of the real thing or scene."

[415] "Magical realism" is used as general term to include: marvellous realism, the marvellous real, fantastic realism, magic realism, and magical realism, See Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, "Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s," *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 4-5.

[416] For further information see, "Collections", <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/collections/guide/latin/> (03/09/2014, 11:15).

[417] For further information see, "Postcolonial Studies @ Emory", <http://postcolonialstudies.emory.edu/magical-realism/> (18/04/2014, 08:12).

[418] Faris, *Magical,* 5.

Going back to the origins of the term marvellous realism, Alejo Carpentier's and Miguel Ángel Asturias' novels the *Kingdom of this World* and *Men of Maiz*, both published in 1949, are often seen as harbingers of magical realism, which subsequently found its ideal form in the emblematic novel of Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967).[419] At this level of the analysis, it is important to briefly review what marvellous realism is and how it is traditionally associated with Alejo Carpentier's writings.

Carpentier establishes a particular relationship between the real and the imaginary in Latin American fiction and defines the "new" form of expression, arguing that

> The marvellous begins to be unmistakably marvellous when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favoured by the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality, perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme state.[420]

Carpentier's proposition of "lo real maravilloso" is perhaps one of the rich definitions of magical realism. Carpentier distinguishes the magical realist fiction by its themes, where myth, legend, and magic are common traits. For him, it provides a new horizon for the conceptualization of magical realism as a corrective project working against monologic political and cultural systems. Hence, the literature of Latin America reflects not only the magical reality there, but also the accompanying faith of the Latin American people which enables the apprehension of that magical reality.[421]

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[419]For further information see, "Postcolonial Studies @ Emory", <http://postcolonialstudies.emory.edu/magical-realism/> (18/04/2014, 08:12).

[420] Faris, *Magical,* 5.

[421] Faris, *Magical,* 6.

With Carpentier, through the particular merit inherent in American reality, the individual subjectivity of the writer is more directly in line with the essential forces of his environment, which herald a new vision. Carpentier affirms that "we, the novelists of Latin America, are witnesses, historians, and interpreters of our great Latin American reality."[422] The literary genre is born as a reaction to the colonial definition of realism, drawing on other peoples' myths, legends and experiences that precede the cultural process of assimilation of a coloniser that became idealised for his power as an example to follow to join world advancement.

Alejo Carpentier attempts to limit this mode to Latin American countries, as a unique experience after the colonisation and enslavement of his country and people. Unlike Capentier, Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris believe in the universality of this mode and emphasise that magical realism was mainly and drastically developed during the second half of the twentieth century around the world. They maintain that the literature of all countries is potentially capable to produce magical realistic works as long as they are compatible with the belief systems of that culture. It is a mixture of realism and fantasy regarded as ordinary daily occurrence or as typical life among the characters. Regardless of the *exceptionality* and *extraordinariness* of the subjects, all involved characters should react indifferently. Zamora and Faris state that "contemporary magical realists write against the illusionism of narrative realism by heightening their own narrative investment in illusion."[423]

More recently, in 1995, the Zamora and Faris anthology entitled *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* is an important step in the debate on

[422] Faris, *Magical,* 7.

[423] Faris, *Magical,* 124.

magical realism. It deals with magical realism as a universal conception. It covers a large geographical area and literary contexts as varied as Europe, Asia, North America, the Caribbean, Australia and Africa. However, because it presents a wide range of different essays, it cannot sustain a consistent definition of the genre and pursue comparative approaches based on close and contextual readings of magical realist novels. According to Zamora and Faris, "Magic Realism is originated as an antagonistic reaction to the European Rationale to demean the dignity of the colonised people. This rejection of the western realism left a gap and the writers had to fill it, and this resulted in the emergence of Magical Realism."[424]

In 2004, in her *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*, Faris offers one of the most comprehensive critical studies of this literary phenomenon. She adopts the same global perspective she shared before with Zamora asserting that magical realism is "perhaps the most important contemporary trend in international fiction."[425] To Faris, magical realism is a mode of narration that has five features. First, the story should include elements of magic. Second, it should depict elements of the phenomenal world. In addition, it should arouse readers' confusion in his perception of the events. Also, the text fuses different realms. Last, it should disquiet standard perception of time, space and identity.[426]

In Faris' presentation of magical realism, through the creation of the narrative space of the "ineffable in-between" – a space between reason and mystery – the genre is able to reinsert into modern narrative a dimension of mystery that is lost in the modern Western world. It reveals a "hidden

[424] Faris, *Magical,* 135-136.

[425] Faris, *Magical,* 136.

[426] Faris, *Magical,* 140-3.

presence of the sacred within the profane."[427] As "linguistic magic" it projects "an implicit aura of the sacred."[428] Speaking more directly of the function of magical realism, Faris argues that the modern-day magical realist writer is like the shaman, who performs for his or her community the important spiritual function of connecting the life of everyday to the world of spirits. Furthermore, similar to the way the shaman enters a spiritual state of consciousness in order to heal the individual and the community, the contemporary magical realist writer uses verbal magic to cure the reader of the too-stifling anchoring to material reality that was the goal of realistic representation.[429] Magical realism, in addition, speaks of cultural crises; it functions to heal specific "social, political, environmental, and religious wounds" occurring in the contemporary global context.[430]

The problem with Faris' definition is that it treats the literary mode in the same way as many Western critics of the genre. What is perceived as magical, marvellous, mythic or fantastic is simply realistic for the people of a different culture. Thus, according to magical realists, the world is impregnated with a magical reality created by the richness of the real or more intense perception of it so that, in the case of the North African desert, this heritage comes from the historical and cultural relations with Africa, Middle East and the Mediterranean Sea in their peculiar magical spiritual influences. Describing two parallel systems in the world, like Carpentier's essay, Alkoni's novels show how while other cultures lost their spirituality and magic, the desert preserves them. This idea is further enhanced in Carpentier's essay, "The Baroque and the Marvellous Real." It proposes the idea that the marvellous

[427] Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 102.

[428] Faris, *Ordinary,* 111.

[429] Faris, *Ordinary,* 80.

[430] Faris, *Ordinary,* 83.

aspect is inherent to the human and natural realities of space and time. This idea is extended by the present work to the North African desert suggesting that the marvellous is a universal phenomenon. As Faris explains:

> In the magical realist texts [...], the supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter, but it is an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence – admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism. Magic is no longer quixotic madness, but normative and normalizing.[431]

Some of the characteristic features of this kind of fiction are "the mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic or strange, skilful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic descriptions, arcane erudition, the element of surprise or abrupt shock, the horrific and the inexplicable."[432]

Considering the geographical area magical realism emerges in, the concept of magical realism is engaged with post-colonialism and together they become an increasingly common line of inquiry in recent debates. Yet, the discussions of the theory of postcolonial magical realism owe the greatest deal to Stephen Slemon[433], particularly to his influential article "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse."[434] One of Slemon's central claims is that magical realism is the genre of the people on the "margins" of mainstream literary tradition. Slemon observes that:

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[431] Faris, *Ordinary,* 158.

[432] Philip Thody, *Twentieth Century Literature: Critical Issues and Themes*, (Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996), 94.

[433] Stephen Slemon, "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse," *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris, <http://cinema2.arts.ubc.ca/units/canlit/pdfs/articles/canlit116-Magic(Slemon).pdfbardi>.

[434] Included in Zamora's and Faris' *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community,* It originally appeared in *Canadian Literature*, 1988.

> The critical use of the concept of magic realism can therefore signify resistance to monumental theories of literary practice—a way of suggesting there is something going on in certain forms of literary writing, and in the modalities of cultural experience that underline those forms, that confounds the capacities of the major genre systems to come to terms with them.[435]

In opposition to the existing canon of genres and modes, and against controlled order, which is the dominant style of the metropolis,[436] magical realism mixes the modern and the traditional, the realistic and the fabulous, the secular and the religious, the sophisticated and the popular, and resists classical expectations of closure and unity. In the postcolonial context, however, this also suggests that magical realism carries a residuum of resistance toward massive imperial centre and presents a positive alternative to the colonial ideology.

Through this duality, a space is created where alternative realities and different perceptions of the world can be conceived. The issue of space is crucial to both magical realism and postcolonial discourse. The struggle between the "centre" and "periphery" is one for space. The discourses of colonialism position the natives as subjects to be studied, observed and spoken about as a way to define space. The imposed literary, social and political systems of Western culture effectively denied a space in which native voices could express themselves. At most, literary contributions emerging from the "margin" were often described as a variant of the original and thus inferior. For these reasons,

> Magical realism has become associated with fictions that tell the tales of those on the margins of political power and influential society. This has

[435] Linda Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire: Postcolonialism and Postmodernism," (Ariel: 1989), 154.

[436] Mchugh, Hybridity, 5.

> meant that much magical realism has originated in many of the postcolonial countries that are battling against the influence of their previous colonial rulers and consider themselves to be at the margins of imperial power.[437]

By adopting the discourse of the margins, the literary genre corresponds to the postcolonial theory's claim. It is in the marginal space that magical realism and post-colonialism meet. To Faris, magical realism originates in postcolonial countries. Her claim is central to our analysis, where Alkoni appears as the magical realist novelist from the postcolonial North Africa. Faris continues that magical realism "has also become a common narrative mode for fictions written from the perspective of the politically or culturally disempowered, for instance indigenous people living under a covert colonial system such as Native Americans in the United States, women writing from a feminist perspective or those whose lives incorporate different cultural beliefs and practices from those dominant in their country of residence, such as Muslims in Britain."[438] Finally, she argues that magical realism can use primitivism, or the recuperation of pre-Enlightenment and indigenous spirit, not in a regressive way but in a way that is "progressive, self-affirming, and radically hybrid."[439] However, she admits, and critics have pointed out, that in the recourse to pre- Enlightenment spirit, there exists some danger of regression to a nostalgic primitivism.

Slemon remains the critic who has drawn the most attention to the importance of binaries within magical realism: such as Europe and its "Other," coloniser and colonised, and the West and the rest, which is followed the Western Rationale; and now is on its way to recover identity in

[437] Faris, *Ordinary*, 33.

[438] Faris, *Ordinary*, 33.

[439] Faris, *Ordinary*, 167.

the magical realist text. From a postcolonial critical standpoint, "these binaries can be read as legacies of the colonial encounter: a condition of being both tyrannized by history yet paradoxically cut off from it, caught between absolute systems of blind cognition and projected realms of imaginative revision in which people have no control."[440]

[440] Faris, Magical, 418.

Berber desert and Berber Identity

Despite sound interest in the North African literature, Berber culture remains peripheral to the Arabic one. I offer here the possible readings of Alkoni's work to investigate Berber identity by examining the events, characters and myths that contribute to the demarcation of collective lines and shared imaginary. In this case, it will be argued that the means by which Alkoni represents identity is essentially magical/mythical and that, by examining these magical/mythical narratives, the reader recognises the way Alkoni approaches his native space and how his texts recreate an authentic North African desert identity.

Myth is the main feature of magical realism in Alkoni's work. The writer debates, in his *My Great Desert*, an auto-critical piece of writing, in which he tells of his "desert novel" as opposed to "city novel." He announces that the nature of desert novel invokes myth, because its language is derived from an alternative approach to time and space. He pinpoints to the fusion of desert novel with myth elaborating [441]

[441] Alkoni. *MG,* 122, "The secret of our being is comprehended in fusing the following trinity: the novel, the void and myth. The novel is the spirit of the secret, the desert its body, and myth its language. […]. In this cycle lies a secret alacrity and thirst for myth. Narrativity and the novel are annihilated unless preserved in mythical language. The aim from the beginning is to create myth. The aim in writing a novel is to construct myth and to dismantle prefixes. The myth of space is possible only in mythical language. It is telling myth from myth sayings and creating myth from the creation of myth itself." [Translation mine].

وجودنا لغز لا يكتمل وجوده الآ بوجود الثالوث: الرواية، الخلاء، الأسطورة. الرواية روح اللغز، والخلاء جسده، والأسطورة لغته. الرواية فيه روح، والأسطورة له روح هذه الروح. في هذا الدور يكمن سر اللهفة الى الأسطورة. هنا يكمن سر الظمأ الى الأسطورة. السرد لا يبقى سردا، والرواية لا تصير رواية، اذا لم تتكلم لغة الأسطورة. غاية الأمر في أساسه هو قول الأسطورة. غاية الرواية أساسا خلق الأسطورة، أو فلنقل ان نية الراوي الأولى هدم البادیات من أساسها، وبناء البديل خارج المكان بمساعدة الأسطورة. أي خلق الأسطورة بواسطة الأسطورة. قول أسطورة عن الأسطورة، تكوين أسطورة عن أسطورة التكوين.

Every human society needs myths, a place and a time of origins. Since myths are a "sum of useful knowledge"[442] and acts already performed that aspire to a fully human experience, oblivion or destruction of this "collective memory"[443] lead to the loss of identity. Without origin to cling to, society inevitably loses its substance and identity. The North African region is at the heart of this problem because its history has been continually perforated by colonisation. For several centuries, the foreigners' or the outsiders' presences were followed by long and agonistic revolts and wars.

Apart from the Arabic and Turkish colonisation of the region for more than fourteen centuries, education, in its European definition and as it is now imposed by North African states on the desert, is a way to annihilate that past of ancient languages, rituals and tales that has become incompatible with modernity. Confronted with such a process of colonisation, one may wonder whether North African natives were able to transmit and maintain the beliefs and rites over time, or these have disappeared altogether. Theoretically, the principles of acculturation as practiced by the colonial system (or after the end of colonisation, through the influence of the

[442] Alkoni. *MG,* 122, [translation mine].

[443] Alkoni. *MG,* 122, [translation mine].

metropolis) have challenged all social and cultural aspects of the dominated while threatening the survival of cultural identity, myths and spiritual elements.

Thus, following this guideline, this study will focus on the events of myth and magical tale in realist North African novels, as well as on possible recreations or adaptations of these elements to the desert. Before going further in depth with these questions, it is vital to define myth and its main characteristics, which are sometimes confused with those of the tale or legend.

According to studies by ethnologists and anthropologists, myth has different definitions. In one of his lectures on myth, Leon Burnett observed that "myth is the filling of the void,"[444] referring to the desert as the void space *par excellence*. In a general tentative to define it, myth is a complex and multifaceted reality, a "dramatic human tale" that is interpreted in various ways. The most common ethnographic definition however insists on the sacredness of myth in telling an event that took place in "primordial time, the fabulous time of "beginnings" [...]. In short, myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic irruptions of the sacred [...] in the World."[445] To consider myth as a sacred story is part of the definition because myth is also a "true story," as Eliade argues that it always refers to realities, for instance, "the creation myth" is "true because the existence of world is there to prove it."[446] This distinction is particularly interesting in the context of the colonised and the contemporary North Africa, as it provides two opposed visions of myth. The first is the approach of traditional societies who consider myth true and therefore 'alive'. The second is the Western perception of myth as fiction, invented stories, as opposed to urban myths

[444] Myth reading group, (Essex University June, 2014).

[445] Eliade, *Myth*, 12.

[446] Eliade, *Myth*, 18.

that are widely studied. According to Eliade, myths and urban legends are associated with a "fictionalisation," which dates back to the demythologising process that dates back to the Greeks. Then, he explains how *mythos* was opposed to *logos* and to *historia*, and hence it lost all its religious and metaphysical values. In the West, there is an essential difference between myth and history, but also between myth and science, if though, for the modern Western man, volcanism is not the act of a god working his forge, or the awakening of a dragon, but a geological phenomenon. Becoming "false stories," these phenomena have lost their supernatural and symbolic values and their importance in the popular consciousness. This "fictionalisation" is not universal, an instance is the mythic realistic novels of Ibrahim Alkoni in which supernatural creatures and folk magical rituals are perceived as mere reality.

Speaking of myths often leads to talk about legends, stories or folklore. These concepts tend to merge interchangeably in the daily use of language. First, folklore in English means *folk* as people and *lore* as knowledge. Folklore can be defined as the set of collective productions which are orally transmitted from one generation to another (including tales, stories and beliefs), or for example, by repeating acts such as the rituals of daily life. This definition is also Maximilien Laroche's who describes it as "people's wisdom, a shared understanding of one's truth,"[447] and as a creative process "in the sense of oral and popular traditions that inspire writers [and] that are used as models for their own work."[448] There is a similarity between myth and folklore, the

[447] Laroche Maximilien, "Literature and Folklore in the Francophone Caribbean," Trad. J. Michael Dash, Arnold, James, Ed. *A History of Literature in the Caribbean, Volume 1, Hispanic and Francophone Regions*, (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994), 341-342.

[448] Laroche, *Literature*, 341.

content of the folklore has a mythical nature, yet it is not organised as myth, it is rather a mythical corpus on which other forms are built.

Another distinction is the one that differentiates myths from legends. Although often confused, these two types of narrations differentiate primarily in their forms. The legend is a scripted story, in Latin *legendum*, which necessitates a written form to which is added some wonderful, spiritual and moral significance. This difference is further enhanced by time. While myth expands on unlimited and imprecise time, the legend is specific in place and time.

The tale, meanwhile, offers a very different definition. Oral tales are similar to myth in that the story is told. It is similar to the ethno-religious myth whose primary function is not to beset by writing but to be ritually re-enacted over time and in a sacred space. Moreover, contrary to legend and history, tales extend, as myths, on vague or imaginary times and places. However, being "Purely imaginary, having no other aim than the entertainment of the hearer,"[449] the tale does not propose a sacred story but often profane or didactic stories. In fact, the tale is not completely different from myth. The tale, through a historical process, is an offspring of myth "[which] continues to have an independent life despite oral/written transpositions."[450] Mircea Eliade argues that if myths are considered by traditional societies as true stories often using cosmological or metaphysical oppositions; tales are false stories focusing on social or moral objections. These two elements establish the main difference in content. Furthermore, the way they are told makes the difference; because while "false stories" can

[449] Laroche, *Literature*, 341.

[450] Laroche, *Literature*, 342.

be told anytime and anywhere myths should be recited during "sacred time."[451]

Thus, myth is primarily a belief that always precedes legend and storytelling. It originally founds the other narratives and inspires them. The legend is a myth extended over time and the tale is, instead, "a kind of myth degraded or profaned, crumbled and disseminated."[452] In light of these clarifications, the complexity of the novels lays in classifying them because of the possible interpretations of one element.

Magical realism and the recreation of Identity in Alkoni

While if European authors use myths in their works they will have an interpretation of myth, for a Latin American or a North African writer the use of myth is rather an act of recreating identity and resistance to a globalising cultural hegemony. Although these writers come from very different backgrounds, thus the widespread oppression of slavery and colonisation in the Latin American case is confronted with the Arabic settlement, the Ottoman marginalisation and the European colonisation of Alkoni's North African space. These events have changed the life, the myth and the culture of the North African native who has originally experienced particular oppression from the different civilisations that crossed his space. The European novel, after Napoleon's conquest of Egypt, portrayed a desert in silence, never given voice to explain its own heritage. It was perceived as an empty space in the Eurocentric map of the world, and so these writers, from their aloof villa view, gave free rein to their imaginations to fill it up.

[451] Eliade, *Myth*, 59.

[452] Eliade, *Myth*, 59.

The North African desert was uprooted from its culture and was academically studied by writers from a Eurocentric background.

After, Paul Bowles' literary quest in the North African space and his maturational process towards a universal apprehension of the desert, in this part, Ibrahim Alkoni focuses mainly on the way the North African quester seeks to redefine and explore his cultural identity through a marvellous or magical real mode of writing. North African magical realism is bound up with a kind of nationalism that seeks to revalue its heritage in popular Berber culture. The works of Alkoni search for a different perspective from the dominant Eurocentric and Arabic discourses, by evoking the myths and the spirituality of the desert where he was born and where reality is magically different from the European one.

After the Fifties, magical realism witnessed a "boom," mainly with Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Indeed, magical realism met a universal recognition and became a literary genre or mode. The concept started to contaminate writers who shared the same experience of colonisation, slavery or segregation. One of the major contaminations came, in 1987, with the Afro-American Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The literary genre or mode that covered the Latin American literary production magnified over the world and also in North Africa. Alkoni's novels are original in exploring the desert from the magical/mythical realist perspective. This part is going to study the enlisted elements of magical realism in Alkoni's trilogy highlighting its specificity to the North African desert.

In these stories, the desert is the ancestral place that the Saharan left behind when the conqueror had arrived to spread greed. Alkoni's protagonists (the *zai'm*, the guardian, Anubi), the place is peopled by *jinn* and spirits after they are left alone either because their people feared the invaders, as in the case

of the Zai'm in *The Animists* who found in the shadows his bond and support[453]

كان أزجر الوطن الوحيد الذي يتبدى فيه الاسلاف ليشاركونا الحياة ويحملون الينا مع ابدانهم عطايا انفس من الكنوز والناموس.

Gold Dust's and *The Bleeding of the Stone's* narrators are the outsiders who can see and depict the inner struggle of their characters and their secrets. The narrator is omniscient and detached from his characters. In the third person, the story is told by a narrator, who has unlimited knowledge, control, and prerogatives over the characters. One faces long pages of description, where the narrator tells us of the characters' thoughts, memories and psyche. Sometimes, the narration stops to offer a definition of some desert elements that the narrator focuses on; also, he likes to use direct speech as a technique of oral storytelling.[454] For instance, when the magical herb, *Assiyar,* is presented in *Gold Dust*, or the *waddan* in *The Bleeding of the Stone*, the narrator defines them using a direct tone as if speaking aside from the rest of the novel. These instances do not make part of the narration, but they have major importance in that the narrator focuses on the elements of the life in the desert and also in affiliating with a tradition of orality. The narrator is limited to description and all-knowing, but he never takes part vis-à-vis good and evil.

In one of Alkoni's novels, *The Maggie*, the narrator presents desert people as the ones, who worshipped and veneered the Sahara, [455]

[453] Alkoni, *Animists*, 18, "Azger was the only home that bridged us to the ancestral life. Our ancestors share with us by offering us the best gifts, treasures and wisdom," [Translation mine].

[454] Oral storytelling or *hallaqa* that means a circle in Arabic. This gathering is also used for religious education; but in the Maghreb storytelling, acting out stories in theatrical manners, involving the audience and answering their questions all is enacted in *hallaqa*. For further details see, Oxford Islamic Studies online, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0212>, (19/12/2014, 10:38).

[455] Alkoni, *Maggie*, 377, "Desert people believed in the religion of the journey, and so wandering became their world." [Translation mine].

فأهل الصحراء هم قوم قد اعتنقوا ديانة الأسفار فصار لهم التجوال وطنا ويقول العرافون والسحرة القدامى: أن الهجرة امتياز موقوف على أهل الصحراء.[456]

It is within this realm of immensity and extension that the narrator of Alkoni dwells. In other words, the long narration is a way to refer to the desert as a huge space and to textualise it.

The connoisseur of the desert applies one of the philosophies of desert life on his text. He textualises infinity. This 'omniscient' narrator controls the stories and shapes them according to rules so different from European ones, which gave birth to a new approach to the genre. With Alkoni, the North African novel is recreated from a desert perspective where the narrator's choice of words is also of crucial importance in understanding the ways of thinking of desert dwellers. Metaphorical expressions such as the aphorisms, in the end of *Anubis,* show the philosophy of the native Berbers in their approach to life. The aphorisms are timeless laws of the desert, they are orally inherited from generation to generation, and Alkoni textualises them and encapsulates their timelessness and immensity.

These expressions show the narrator's point of view concerning the issues or the characters. This explains the idea of the personal point of view that prevails in Alkoni's work. The narrator declares himself non-objective in his endeavour to depict his characters from his mythical vision of the world. The narrator allures his readers that he is dealing with a reality. Instead, he depicts a myth or a mythical reality. In these stories, the Western rationale converses with its opposite; so does the natural with the supernatural and the possible with its reverse, when the narrator bridges between the human and the animal worlds to construct the textual mythical dimension.

[456] Alkoni, *Maggie*, 377, "The ancient soothsayers and Maggie said: 'migration is the excellence of desert people.'" [Translation mine].

Alkoni's work is often described as *'aja'ibi* (marvellous) or simply magical. In fact, these definitions relate him to magic realism. His transgression in depicting the nature of the events, characters, and settings is offspring of a magical and mythical North African reality. Indeed, the texts are filled with stories such as Anubi's awakening, instead of birth, his search for the father, or the eternal god father that dictates an eternal quest on nomads, and the protagonist's transformation into a mythical beast. Assouf's father tells the reader of an everlasting war between the mountain and the plain, whose spirit travels from sky to earth, then to animals, and to humans. Another instance is the *waddan* and his majestic mythical presence in the narrative of the *The Bleeding of the Stone* and *Gold Dust*.

Like the *waddan* in *The Bleeding of the Stone* or the gazelle in *Anubis*, in *Gold Dust*, there is the Carthage myth of Tanit[457], the goddess of love and fertility for the ancient Libyans. The protagonist promises to sacrifice a bull for the goddess Tanit if his Ablaq is cured. Then living through a series of disasters, he thinks of his vow and about the quality and the right time to fulfil it. Afterwards, he has no means to sacrifice the bull because he kills it for his unblessed wedding. He betrays his father and his mythical mother, he treats Tanit as a father in the novel, and he continues to regret it in the novel. Tanit is present in the story; her symbol comes to the threshold of the narrative for numerous times. Her voice is echoed by the cave drawings that Ukhayyad

[457]Johanna Stuckey, "Tanit of Carthage," (Matrifocus: Lammas, 2009), 4-8, <http://www.matrifocus.com/LAM09/spotlight.htm>. "In the closely related Semitic dialects Phoenician and Punic,[3] the goddess's name was written tnt (Lipiński 1995: 199). Scholars have rendered it diversely as Tanit, Tannit, Tanit(h), Tennit, or Tinnit. However, its meaning is still disputed. One explanation is that it comes from the Semitic root "to lament" and so signifies "She Who Weeps," perhaps for a disappearing (dying) god like Adonis (Lipiński 1995: 199; Lipiński in Lipiński 1992: 438). Yet other scholars translate Tanit as "Dragon or Serpent Lady." This would be an example of an epithet "later personified as a distinct goddess" (Meyers 1997: IV, 316). "Tanit," according to this theory, derived from the same root as Tannin, the snaky, dragon-like sea monster of Canaanite myth and the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah 51: 9; Ezekiel 29: 3-5) (Olyan 1988: 53-54 note 63). The first to make this suggestion was F. M. Cross, and he also argued that Tanit began as an epithet of the Canaanite goddess Asherah (1973:32-33; Olyan 1988: 58)."

observes in his last refuge; that is meant to remind him of his mistakes and his oath.

Anubi is another character named after Anubis, the Egyptian god of mummification and the rites of passage. The narrator elects him as the founding father of two outbreaks. In his quest for the father, a metaphor for renewal and life, he stands for the nomad population. He foreshadows loss for his offspring because of his sins. His story, as Alkoni describes in the preface, is a mythical interpretation of humankind's being and quest on earth.

Innovative techniques and style

In *The Bleeding of the Stone*, the narrator chooses for his chapters titles like: The Stone Icon, Praying Before the Guardian Idol, Twilight Visitors, A devil Called Man, The Price of Solitude, The Girl, A Phantom from the Himalayas, The Vow, The Pit, The Transformation, The Waran, The Cannibals… and the last is *The Bleeding of the Stone*. They are twenty-six short chapters, which accelerate storytelling. The titles revealed the compound of the chapters like the girl chapter: and how Assouf was educated to fear from his father's authority and this is how his mother calls him a girl. One of the parts is called "Adam," where Cain threatens Assouf to eat his flesh if he does not reveal to him the secret of the magical *waddan*. In this chapter, Cain's past is revealed to the reader: he killed his father Adam, he killed his sister and "ate her flesh

too."[458] Assouf answered him with the Koranic verse "only through dust will the son of Adam be filled."[459]

The chapters are short independent narrative units that seem not to open on one another. In fact, a chapter has a beginning and an end that are interrelated by a particularly complete story. Chapter one, for instance, starts with "The Stone Icon" and finishes the following day, "next day […]."[460] In between there are narrative elements like Aswaf's prayers, the goat, the stone, and the caves. In chapter two, there are Aswaf's prayers in front of the rocks, the description of the rocks' drawings, and Assouf's father's stories of myth and *jinn*.

In some chapters, there is a lack of the chronological order, as in the chapter "a Devil Called Man," The narrator starts his contemplation in the present time:

> The heart is the guide for those who don't understand people. The heart is the fire by which the bedouin's guided in the desert of this world, just as a man lost in the wilderness will be guided by the Idi star. All other stars transform and move, shift and vanish. Only this one stays firm until morning. Idi is like the heart. It doesn't deceive.[461]

Then the narrator uses the past to talk about Assouf's relationship with his father before dying "the old man went off to hunt […]."[462] In the other parts of the chapter, he recalls his past (as in the *waddan* sequence). Therefore, the order of the sequences does not respect chronology. The first three chapters ("The Stone Icon", "Praying before the Guardian Idol", and "Twilight

[458] Alkoni. *BS*, 117.

[459] Alkoni. *BS*, 117.

[460] Alkoni. *BS*, 6.

[461] Alkoni. *BS*, 17.

[462] Alkoni. *BS*, 23.

Visitors") seem to follow the chronological order. The rest of the novel does not have the same order as it contains sequences from the past and these flashbacks are mixed down with the present time of the story. In the last chapters, the narrator turns back to Assouf's story with the visitors, which is the actual story of *The Bleeding of the Stone*.

In *Gold Dust*, Alkoni divides his novel into thirty-two short chapters without giving them any title. He practically follows the same strategy of *The Bleeding of the Stone*. Therefore, the narrator tells us how Ukhayyad fell in love with his Ablaq and the way this latter misbehaved and had the sickness that would have killed him. However, in chapter six, the all-knowing narrator goes back to the far past to describe myths, saints and rites of sacrificing in the desert, assuming the tone of the anthropologist,

> It is this fearsome witch doctor who first demolished the myth of the shrine. The stone base of the shrine was triangular. At the top, the image of the god was set into the body of a large stone. Its neckless head sat directly on the torso. Its enigmatic features suggested it had been worshipped for millennia. […]. The idol evoked tenderness and harshness, mercy and vengeance, wisdom and arrogance, and above all, patience—the patience of immortals well acquainted with the treachery of time and the loneliness of existence.[463]

In that shrine where "they spelled the name of an ancient Saharan god, [h]e went on to decipher the ancient Tifinagh alphabet, […], [Ukhayyad] stood there a long time,"[464] then knelt to pray for the safety of Ablaq. Thus in his first novels, *Gold Dust* and *The Bleeding of the Stone*, Alkoni engages with the late twentieth-century Arabic novel in avoiding chronology in the sequence order, which he follows in his later works such as *Anubis*.

[463] Alkoni. *BS*, 28.

[464] Alkoni. *BS*, 29.

In *Anubis*, a decade later, the construction of the sequences seems more complex than in the preceding novels. The author divides it into three big parts. He partitions every part into small sequences and gives each one of them a title. The first, "Cradle Talk", has eight sequences (Sunrise-forenoon-when the flocks head home-late afternoon-Dusk-my-last watch of the night-Dawn). In the same way, the other two parts are divided into eight sections and have around the same number of pages using a solar timing as in the first part. In sequence one, Sunrise, there is the story of Anubi's birth and this new-born desire to search for his father. Then, the Dawn witnesses the protagonists killing the priest, who confesses then that he is the one who killed his mother. In part two, Passionate Talk, in "First Light," Anubi is reborn in a half-animal-and-half-beast shape and felt free; he describes it as follows:

> In the profound, unfamiliar talisman, I saw myself. The stone eyeball was transformed into the surface of water flowing from heavens spring, Salsabil, and I saw myself clearly in it. I so I was a monster. I so I was a freak. I saw I was a creature patched together from two disparate animals. […]. Only then I was freed. I could feel my body becoming liberated. I regained the ability to stand erect and found that I had the power to spread through the air.[465]

In this passage, Anubi becomes the mythical Anubis. In his damnation, Anubi becomes hybrid: he feels natural and super-natural, human and super-human. He is reborn in myth. The last sequence, eight of part II, ends when Anubis builds up his edifice: "so I sang a touching song of praise for my glorious edifice, to which kinsmen would later bow in prayer, designating it a temple."[466] Accordingly, Anubi, in his middle age, builds up his spiritual

[465] Alkoni. *BS*, 56-57.

[466] Alkoni. *BS*, 96.

home, for an eternal wanderer, a real home is like a grave. In fact, part III presents "Grave Talk," in which Anubi stands in a mid-way between "the spirit world" and the "spawn of men." He is reborn again, in his real offspring. The story ends with Anubi killed by his own son, who searches for the father, recalling part I.

As a mythical figure, Anubis enacts an eternal existence in the character of Anubi. His death, in part III, announces the eternal oral heritage of the desert, in the form of "Aphorisms of Anubis." Another remarkable strategy, in *Anubis*, is the way Anubi does things thinking that they are true visions, then, in other parts of the story, the same actions are continually interpreted and given other meanings. One instance is when he kills the priest; later he discovers that the same priest was his own father for whom he had been searching. His quest for his origins is the *raison d'être* of the story. He commits murder because the priest confessed that he had killed Anubi's mother. Later in the novel, he discovers that the priest did not kill his mother, but this latter offered her life in a 'normal' act of sacrifice.

The plot in *Anubis* is simple. Yet, one's understanding of the events is mystified by 'logic'. The story challenges the mainstream European approach to Reason and Truth in that it offers an alternative way of approaching fiction. The general image tells of an ancient story that is perpetuated in the future, as the sons of Anubi are damned to loss in the desert. Alkoni's style does not sharply challenge the notion of time but it explains how the past is a mirror image of the present. It is an expansion over the axis of time; as myth is continuously re-interpreted. His stories offer an image beyond history. *Anubis'* structure recalls Nietzsche's "The Three Metamorphoses of Zarathustra," whose treatment of loneliness in the desert is echoed in Anubi's solitude: "But in the loneliest desert happens the second metamorphosis: here the spirit becomes a lion; he will seize his freedom and

be master in his own wilderness."[467] Finally, the enemy of Anubi is himself and his offspring and so is in Zarathustra, "But the worst enemy you can encounter will always be you, yourself; you lie in wait for yourself in caves and woods."[468]

There are many readings of these stories within the stories; the assumption, crucial to our analysis of Alkoni's novels, is that characters have mythical and magical lives. Walid Ben Hmid Althihly studies these elements in Alkoni's *The Animists* and confirms that these elements are used in a way to relate myth to reality in a space where the desert is considered as the centre of the earth and "myth as the spirit of the desert." Althihly says: [469]

تلك الأمكنة وظفت بين الواقعي والأسطوري وتبعا لذلك فان وجودها ومصيرها مرتبط بالشخصيات ... وهي أمكنة تفاعلت معها وأثرت في نفسيتها وسلوكياتها ... بعد أن راى الصحراء روح الأرض

In general, Alkoni's narrators are authoritarian: they tell, report, explain and justify the events. The point of view is predominantly univocal in the novels, except for short excerpts, where the protagonist or some sage priest or father has short instances of altering the meaning. Only in *Anubis,* the narrator speaks in the first person while he tells the story of a whole tribe or the humanity as Alkoni explains.

Unlike modern Arabic fiction, Alkoni's novels do not rely on classical narrative techniques. The narrator adheres to the rules of the desert that seems to have its own army of saints and prophets who preserve its aphorisms that the narrator has to recreate from one story to the other. Alkoni repeats one sentence in many of his novels: "The desert grows: woe

[467] Friedrich, Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/637655-but-in-the-loneliest-desert-happens-the-second-metamorphosis-here>, 1.

[468] Nietzsche, *Thus,* 1.

[469] Althihly, *Aesthetics*, 127, "Those places are used in a way between realist and mythical [...] they influence the characters who act according to one creed the desert is the spirit of the earth." [Translation mine].

to him who harbours the desert within."[470] Again, he recalls Zarathustra. Other depictions of the desert are:

> The desert is a paradise of nonexistence.
>
> For everybody, the desert is a place of exile, whereas for the spirit, the desert is a paradise.
>
> Water cleanses the body, but the desert cleanses the soul.
>
> The world is a body and the desert its spirit.[471]

This shows that the principle narrator tells a second hand story that is shown from expressions such as: "he has been told – people remember – they say etc." Mohammed Albardi, in his *Features of Narrative Discourse*, describes Alkoni's novels as based on "telling events" from a unidirectional point of view and sums his aims in "writing the epic of the desert with all its mythic heroes, stories and events."[472] As a caravan crossing the desert, in the majority of Alkoni's fiction, the narrative movement is linear moving towards the aim and giving no space for repetition, which is often considered as the predominant poetic style in modern Arabic literature. In *Gold Dust* and *The Bleeding of the Stone*, the action is linear towards the downfall of the protagonist. The narrator stops in *Gold Dust* to refer to knowledge of the desert:

> "The gods do not forgive those who break promises."
>
> "Sons may be the security of their fathers—but they are also their undoing."
>
> "The meaning of everything returned to what it had once been—with vengeance."[473]

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[470] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Among Daughters of the Desert (Dithyrambs of Dionysus),* History Genius, <http://news.rapgenius.com> (19/12/2014, 12:08).

[471] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 172-4.

[472] Mohammed Albardi, *Features of Narrative Discourse,* <http://www.startimes.com/?t=14943345>, 73.

[473] Alkoni, *GD*, 6-18-49.

All the same, in *The Bleeding of the Stone*, there are similar stops and intervals where the desert speaks,

> "The heart is the guide for those who don't understand people. The heart is the fire by which the bedouin's guided in the desert of this world, just as a man lost in the wilderness will be guided by the Idi star. All other stars transform and move, shift and vanish. Only this one stays firm until morning. Idi's like the heart. It doesn't deceive."
>
> "Only through dust will the son of Adam be filled."
>
> "I, the high priest of Matkhandouch, prophesy, for the generations to come, that redemption will be at hand when the sacred waddan bleeds and the blood issues from the stone. It is then that the miracle will be born; that the earth will be cleansed and the deluge cover the desert."[474]

The voice, in these instances, is unknown and independent from the narration. It informs, explains and directs the events. They are central to the understanding of the desert. They are ancient voices echoed in the narration, and all that is ancient makes part of the essence of the desert. Apart from informing, this voice is warning: do not kill your brother, do not kill the *waddan*, do not look for the father etc. It is a living collective memory that does not submit to the rules of time.

Time in the desert "crosses thousands of years distance without moving from his place."[475] For this reason, Assouf consults his goddess Tanit's images in his shelter and recalls his father's teaching word for word. He lives in a place full of celestial visions, guarding shadows and ghosts. Alkoni shows how desert man is chained by his own memory; a memory that becomes

[474] Alkoni, *BS*, 17-14-116.

[475] Alkoni, *BS,* 111.

images scripts and sculptures in caves or on the rocks on which the ancestors chartered their solitude and struggle. Sculptures become maps in the vast desert for its people, who know how to read its signs and never lose their way home, if they choose to have one. According to the ways of the desert, everything has a circular form. Their cemeteries are circular, as *The Animists* present them, to explain that death like life is circular. They tell the characters about the rules of other times and all times and the wisdom they can acquire by analysing the circular form and think in a circular way. It is because of the circularity of the world that parents are never lost and those who leave, one day, return home. In their journeys, they enter another dimension of the desert, which offers peace for the lost and the exiled. Some of these ancestral assertions are presented in the form of epigraphs.

The metaphysics of the desert

Alkoni's opus speaks of the desert in a creative way; so the novels often start with epigraphs that tell us of the metaphysical, Sufi, and mythical atmosphere his protagonists are going to experience. These two epigraphs open *Gold Dust*

> For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. (Ecclesiastes 3:19-20)[476]
>
> Among those owing fealty to the sultan of this kingdom are the peoples of the deserts of gold dust. The heathen savages who live there bring him gold

[476] Alkoni, *GD*, 1.

> each year, and when the sultan wishes, he seizes them as his slaves. But the rulers of his kingdom know from experience, no sooner do they conquer one of these cities than the gold begins to dwindle. No sooner do they establish Islam there, and no sooner does the call to prayer go out, than the gold dries up completely. Meanwhile, throughout the neighbouring heathen countries, the gold continues to grow and grow. (Ibn Fathlallah al-'Umari (1301-1349). *The Kingdom of Mali and its Surroundings*)[477]

These epigraphs open *Gold Dust*. The first is a biblical reference that teaches the importance of equality between man and his beast in death. The second is a historical presentation of the importance and provenience of gold dust from Africa, shedding light on how Islam contributed to the economic regression of kingdoms that followed a mystical way of life. It may be also the source of the novel's title. This chapter is concerned with Alkoni's experimentation with inserting paratextual references into his novels. In *Gold Dust*, Alkoni opens the story with a reference to Ecclesiastes and to ibn Fathlallah al-'Umari. These two epigraphs introduce key concepts that the novel develops later. While the first considers "men" and "beasts" equal in front of death, the second tells of the "gold dust" and its devastating presence in the economic system of the desert.

The same strategy is apparent in *The Bleeding of the Stone*. The first epigraph compares animals with human beings: "There are no animals on land or birds flying on their wings, but are communities like your own. (Quran 6:38)."[478] It tells of Alkoni's anxiety about the desert landscape and how this latter is threatened by man's greed and bloody nature. Then, as the Cain in the story massacres the animals and the protagonist, Alkoni resorts to a holy text to introduce the character who is in enmity with his brother: "And it

[477] Alkoni, *GD,* 1.

[478] Alkoni, *BS*, 1.

came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him." (-Genesis 4:8-12)[479] Therefore, desert people from Cain's descent are damned to bear the blood of the brother wherever they go and to live "fugitive" and "vagabond" for the evil he did.

In *Anubis*, which is published after a decade of *Gold Dust* and *The Bleeding of the Stone*, Alkoni continued to use the same technique. In the opening page of the novel, it is said: "The Lord God fashioned Adam from the dust of the earth and blew the spirit of life into his nostrils so that Adam became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)."[480] The quote refers to the creation myth and so the novel is going to tell of Anubi's story and the Tuareg creation.

The observer of the series of epigraphs notices that the space is perceived as a metaphysical world that remains so different from the conventional reality and attached to the immemorial time. The desert is the place where all the protagonists yearn to live in and happens to be the echoed narrative element in all Alkoni's literature. These different Saharan places tell of the Saharan Man, his memory of a space entrusted with the sacred and brooder of good and bliss. It is the lost paradise for the living inhabitants who missed the antique temple of the ancestors.

These references lead the reader to the content of the novel. The idea of the animal is exposed again. The idea of man killing his human brother and his loss and eternal quest for peace is the damnation of the killer and his offspring. In *Anubis*, the reference to Old Testament in "The Lord God…" is a renewal of the creation myth that tunes with the birth of Anubi as the father of the Tuareg tribe. The other chapters of the novel are introduced by similar

[479] Alkoni, *BS*, 1.

[480] Alkoni, *Anubis,* 1.

references. They are parallels to the narration that start with an exposition of "knowledge," belief or wisdom.

They are quotes that open the chapters. They tell of Alkoni's intertextuality: rich of its references, its metaphors. They inform of Alkoni's wide and different cultures from which he knows how to lead his readers towards the best and the richest scenes. He shows a thorough knowledge of the Koran and the Bible, ancient and modern literature, philosophy, and civilisation and Eastern wisdom.

Accordingly, Alkoni puts his novels on a universal scale and makes of the desert the origin of wisdom. The examples used in this part are from the three novels of our interest. However, the selection may include other texts of Alkoni for the sake of giving a general framework of his technique. The focus of this part is on the desert and on the writer's magical realist approach to the space.

The reader is often given two epigraphs in the beginning of the chapters. These references introduce key concepts from other universally acknowledged texts. They echo the ancestral past and so simple acts become rituals of old times. In fact, these key concepts are life, death, community, animal, human, materialism, individualism etc. In these stories, there is often a struggle between opposites. The desert is the arena, where these concepts are given human or human-like shapes and called characters. The characters fight against one another, against place and time. Their epic fights end in death. The characters that stand for *good* are usually: the priest, the father, the chief, mothers, and anyone who believes in the spirit of the desert and perpetuate its timeless ancestral aphorisms. Others are wicked: women, Dodo, Cain and all the characters that stand for materialism, greed, seduction and defy desert's wisdom. This crisis and struggle drive the plot and

characters. However, the code, as announced, in the quotes represents the substance of the truth and life.

On the ancient rocky manuscript, Assouf cares about the truth that the symbols tell of the "ancestors with giant stature"[481] wearing masks, putting a stone on their heads, hunters and masters with Waddan's masks, horns, silence, prestige and mystery. These stones carved with the ancestral spirit offer a symbolic truth open to interpretation, ageless, timeless and author-free oeuvre. Assouf knows that these stones are desert treasures; they are the temple of wisdom and he becomes their priest. In *Anubis*, the sages sing:

> We who love stone
>
> Are the people of the prophetic counsel,
>
> The sages,
>
> The shapers of existence.
>
> We have created the world.[482]

The stone guardians, readers and deciphers of its signs are the creators of meaning, life and humanity. Assouf prays everywhere, in the desert that becomes an open air, vast and sacred earthly temple. Cain defies the sacredness of *waddan* and the desert. However, Assouf dies while Cain peoples the desert with greed as will do his offspring. "Every single thing the eye beholds, in the desert, carries a prophecy."[483] Therefore, truffles, *waddan* and stones speak a symbolic language that desert people can interpret. In the desert, there is nothing of a one-dimensional identity. It is the space where human and beyond human identities are equated as the following excerpt from *The Animists* indicates:

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[481] Alkoni, *BS*, 90.

[482] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 110.

[483] Alkoni, *BS*, 112.

> A word of signs and prophecies is the "dark" and the mysterious world of the desert. Daytime is light and light has no secret. Daytime is sunshine and gold is shining while the real treasure is in the wisdom of the sage elders who keep its loom secret.[484]

There is also, in *The Bleeding of the Stone*, the same animist idea of the wisdom in every corner of the desert: "The heart is the guide for those who don't understand people. The heart is the fire by which the Bedouin's guided in the desert of this world, just as a man lost in the wilderness will be guided by the Idi star. All other stars transform and move, shift and vanish. Only this one stays firm until morning. Idi's like the heart. It doesn't deceive."[485] In fact, the value of the heart in the second quote is given the positive side of the balance.

On the other side, there is gold that Alkoni's people demonise as "ominous and damned." Indeed, Alkoni employs an extended imagery over his work. In *The Animists, The Maggie, Night Herb, Gold Dust* and other of his works, light imagery against dark imagery is argued over long pages. For instance, in *Night Herb* (1997), the imagery runs over eight pages, it says: [486]

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[484] Alkoni, *Maggie*, 18.

[485] Alkoni, *BS*, 17.

[486] Ibrahim AlKoni, *'uchib Al-Layl, Night Herb*, (Lebanon: Tassili, 1996), 29-34, "The historians explain the crystallisation of Wan Tahit's identity and his longing to darkness. He left the tribe and ordered his servants to put his tent far away. […]. He stood in his tent's corner, the darkest part made of the black tissue. He started to put only black clothes and to talk to himself […]. He stopped talking to people […] he preferred to walk by night in "wadi Aljinn," even his nights are limited to the ones without moon and stars. […]. He sang: "those women are empty. Empty. The white women's void is vast. Oh! Dear desert sky ornamented with your stars! How ugly are white women!" […]. "Whiteness is sleight. The white colour is the biggest trap. Whiteness does not hide anything. It has nothing to hide. This is the vice. […]. Whiteness is clear to the eyes. It is like the virgin when she loses her virginity. She loses her secret at that moment. If she loses her secret, beauty is lost." […]. "Blackness! Oh blackness! What do you see in blackness except blackness? Did you ask what this noble veil hides? […]. He discovered the secret of blindness in the sages…" [translation mine].

الظلمات. يروق له في هذه الجولات أن يحاور الكائنات المجهوله بصوت عال، ويعاركهم بألفاظ حرمها الناموس على القوم، وقديتضاحك بأصوات أعلى كأنه يستجيب لملح رفاق الخفاء. [...]. في ذلكالوقت سمع المماليك هذيان مولاهم الذي طاب له أن يردد في جولاته الليلية عبارة تقول: "خاويات. خاويات. ما أكبر خواء البيضاوات. أوه. يا سماء الصحراء الموشومة بالنجوم، ما أقبح البيضاوات! ". [...]. وفي مرة أخرى قال:"البياض باد للعيان. البياض مفضوح كبتول فقدت بكارتها، والبتول تفقد سرها اذا فقدت البكارة. واذا فقد السر ضاع الجمال. هل أراهن بقطعاني كلها لكي أبرهن للبلهاء أن لا جمال لشئ أضاع سره؟" [...]. يغني:"السواد. السواد. ماذا تعرفون عن السواد؟ ماذا ترون في السواد غير السواد؟ ماذا ترون وراء السواد غير الظلمة التي تسمونها سوادا؟ هل تسءلتم يوما عما يخفيه هذا الحجاب النبيل؟". [...]. الآن، فقط، عرف سر العرافين العميان. [...].الآن، فقط، عرف سبب تفوقهم على قرناء البصر الذين يعتقد الناس أنهم يبصرون. الآن بعد أن جرب ضياء المملكة الخفية التي يسميها بلهاء القبائل ظلمة، وتحمم بسلسبيل النبوءة، وتلبس الخفاء في وطن الحقيقة، الآن، فحسب، أكبر في الكهنة الحقيقيين عشقهم للظل، وتعلقهم بالعماء، واستهانتهم برؤيا العين، لأنهم لم يروا فيها أكثر مما يجب أن يرى بحدقة العين، لم يروا فيها أبعد من المدى المكشوف على الفراغ، المى المنتهك، المدنس، المقلوب، الذي انتزعت منه اللؤلؤة، وسرق من بين يديه الكنز، و أخفي بعيدا.

The imagery is extended over the whole novel to create a clear counter discourse to European supremacy. It challenges the colour that has a long historical controversy with the rest of the non-white world. Wan Tahit chooses blackness and darkness as symbols of secrecy and mystery, he prefers the unknown to what is shared and seen by everybody. Shining and light, to Wan Tahit, blur vision and unveil part of the truth. He sees wisdom in the other unveiled part of the truth. It is in his words that he shakes the beliefs that were generated by European enlightenment. He also challenges the aesthetics of whiteness in designing human beauty, which has been the subject of painting and literature for long centuries. In fact, like all of Alkoni's literature, this novel challenges beliefs and open the window on an infinite world of possibilities, where reality is not only what one sees in a city, island or colour.

In *Gold Dust*, Ukayyad's father warns him from falling in love with beautiful women and compares their magnetic and evil nature to gold dust. The same happens to the Ablaq that has a disease because of his sexual impulse. In the epigraph of chapter twenty, Alkoni quotes: "for those who love, life exists only in death. You cannot hold the heart of the beloved without having first lost your worn."[487] In Rumi's text, "love is loss" predicts the loss of Ukhayyad by marrying the outsider. Women, in Alkoni's novels, are seductive, magnetic, magic, *jinn* and destructive. In one of his interviews by Aljazeera,[488] Alkoni explains that he does not put women in the wicked part. He insists on his balanced discourse in depicting female characters.[489]

Thus, the paradoxical references are loaded with visions and perceptions of life in a metaphysical dimension. They bridge external texts with narrative in a moment of fusing different texts, different cultures and different writers who meet in Alkoni's text. This crossing echoes the one in the desert and Alkoni's narrative quest in the Sahara. Crossing the desert is joining two extremities where the beginning becomes an end and the end turns into another start. *Ceilings* is another desert novel by Alkoni, it inspires Ghanemi to write his *Epic Ceilings*, where he presents the meaning behind Alkoni's literature.

Accordingly, these spatial limits barely delineated by the desert alter the movement towards death as the shadow of life that desert man faces as the rite of passage to the symbolic life of his ancestors. In Alkoni's novels, the protagonists face death to defend their principles. Indeed, violence and

[487] Alkoni, *GD*, 103.

[488] Ibrahim Alkoni, Interv. Aljazeera, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5j4Z6Dy62A&index=4&list=PLFE9803A4E0387C7D> (30/10/2014, 13:22).

[489]Ibrahim Alkoni, Interv. Aljazeera, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5j4Z6Dy62A&index=4&list=PLFE9803A4E0387C7D> (30/10/2014, 13:22).

death are recurring in Alkoni's work. He thus presents the desert as a death experience that aims at securing life and by doing so; it carves its own anthology from within as Alkoni's text that defines itself from within. The carved text is a piece of collective memory. This is paralleled by Alkoni's text as a space meant to encounter other writers and to gather around the desert. To achieve this universal effect, Alkoni borrows phrases from different sources: Sufi, mythical, ancient and modern literature, oriental and occidental.

Monolithic references as desert wisdom

The chequered text is perforated by a religious vein. At first glance, the three monolithic "sacred" books are omnipresent in the epigraphs and in the language he uses. The presence of these texts as direct reference to support the narration is only one of the multi-faceted techniques Alkoni uses to make his texts as universal as himself (Alkuni is his original name, though he prefers to be called Alkawni which means "the universal" in Arabic). In the following paragraphs, an analysis of these references will clarify the writer's intentions.

First, the Koran is one of the important sources of the para-textual references. The Tuareg's religion is basically Islam, though it is believed that they have a "profane" approach to this religion.[490] In addition, Alkoni writes in Arabic and it is believed that the Arabic language became widespread after the Koran and the Islamic invasions.[491] Indeed, Alkoni uses full Quranic

[490] Jan Perier, *Des Races Dites Berberes et de Leurs Ethnogenie*, Paris: A. Hennye, 1873, 32.

[491] Perier, *Races*, 32.

verses, for instance, in *Gold Dust*, "There are no animals on land or birds flying on their wings, but are communities like your own. (Quran 6:38)."[492]

The reader of *The Bleeding of the Stone* first knows Assouf, in his first action: praying. In the second chapter, Assouf prays in front of the "Pagan Monument," which is the title of the chapter. Other examples are words such as the "demon," "devil," God, Cain, too many prayers, verses from Sourat "Ikhlass" and "Fatiha." "Since that incident he'd described to Assouf, [his father] had become wary of hunting the *waddan*, and would never venture to the majestic heights until he'd recited all the Koranic verses he'd memorized, repeated, in Hausa, all the spells of the African magicians, then hung around his neck all the snakeskin amulets he'd bought from soothsayers traveling in caravans from Kano."[493]

In his spiritual understanding of Christianity, Assouf explains the Italian anthropologist adoration of the monument,

> He often wondered just what lay behind the Christians' interest in the ancient paintings. He decided, finally, they must be making pilgrimage to the Matkhndoush figures because they belonged to the same old religion; they didn't after all, believe in the Prophet Muhammad, or kneel facing the Ka'aba as Muslims did. Veneration, and supplication and surrender, were revealed in their eyes; betrayed too by the odd way their hands moved over their faces as they examined the vast figure of the king of the wadi, and his sacred waddan that rose alongside him, contemplating the far horizon. The Christians stood before the masked giant exactly as Muslims stood before God. And yet his father had told him this masked jinni was his ancestor too.[494]

[492] Alkoni, *BS*, 1.

[493] Alkoni, *BS*, 23.

[494] Alkoni, *BS*, 10.

Assouf's reading parts from a centralized religious approach to the world. Assouf's understanding seems too naïve, it is rather his alternative or metaphoric explanation of a different culture and mainly his own beliefs. The masked giant is paralleled to God, and then is identified by him. It is a particular way of Alkoni to render religion a unique universal experience mainly in the last sentence.

In *Gold Dust*, he calls "o people! This she-camel of God is a sign unto you. Let her feed on God's earth. Do her no harm, lest a swift penalty afflict you!"[495] Using Koranic[496] words, Ukhayyad prays to Tanit, addressing her as a male-god:

> O lord of the desert, god of the ancients! I promise to offer up to you one fat camel of sound body and mind. Cure my piebald of his malignant disease and protect him from the madness of silphium! You are the all hearing, the all knowing.[497]

In this prayer, Ukhayyad uses pagan expressions and Koranic phrases[498] and in mixing up the 'sacred' and the 'profane', Alkoni reveals the Berber ways to Islam. Therefore, instead of praying to Muslims' God, he prays the Lord of the desert that he calls by male names whereas it is the Goddess Tanit as it comes later to the reader. Then, in the "all hearing" and "all knowing" there is direct reference to Koran.

In *The Maggie*, the narrator describes the desert as the one that "feeds and shelters him," which is a Koranic verse[499]. Thus, the Koran is present in

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[495] Alkoni, *GD,* 91.

[496] *The Koran*, trans. N. J. Dawood, (London: Penguin, 1956), "And O my people, this is the she-camel of Allah - [she is] to you a sign. So let her feed upon Allah's earth and do not touch her with harm, or you will be taken by an impending punishment." (Hud), 64.

[497] Alkoni, *Gold*, 29-30.

[498] *The Koran*, "And remember Abraham and Isma'il raised the foundations of the House (With this prayer): "Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us: For Thou art the All-Hearing, the All-knowing." (Al-baqara), 127

[499] *The Koran*, "Who feeds them against hunger and gives them security against fear." (Kurayich), 4.

Alkoni's novels' structures, language, lexicon and significance. The story Cain and Abel[500] is extended over the whole narrative of *The Bleeding of the Stone*. The same story is evoked in *Night Herb* when Wan Teehay kills his closest friend, the priest, and buries his body under his carpet, then starts his struggle with giant worms that strive to reveal his secret. In *Gold Dust*, Ukhayyad's wife is the reason behind his exile from his tribe, the loss of his position as the chief's son, the exposure to the Italian colonial machinery and hunger; it is reminiscent of the Biblical[501]-Koranic[502] exile of Adam from Heaven because of Eve.

To conclude this part, the Koranic[503] references are numerous and affect the different levels of narration, language, choice of words and the story itself. This is perhaps explained by Alkoni's Muslim culture; it is more for the Sufi and spiritual wisdom that make part of the North African desert people.

On the other hand, another feature of postcolonial magical realism of borrowing from the different cultures that passed from the space, the Bible is another important source of inspiration in Alkoni's novels. It also inspires the language, structure and significance of the texts. Epigraphs are readers' first encounter with the text, which sheds light on Alkoni's premise that the text is the offspring of other texts. In *Anubis*, which is the novel that comes twelve years after the *The Bleeding of the Stone* and *Gold Dust*, there are few references to the Koran while all the epigraphs are biblical. When Anubi first opens his eyes as a sign of consciousness of the surrounding world, the

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[500] For further reference see, All about Christianity, <http://christianity.about.com/od/oldtestamentpeople/p/adamprofile.htm> (20/12/2014, 12:24).

[501] For further reference see, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/the-fall.html> (20/12/2014, 12:24).

[502] For further reference see the Quran, (*Sūrat al-Aʿrāf*, 19–22) <http://www.al-islam.org/ismat-infallibiity-of-prophets-in-the-quran-sayyid-muhammad-rizvi/case-adam> (20/12/2014, 12:24).

[503] For further reference see, *The Coran*, <http://knowingallah.com/index.php/en/articles/article/7086> (18/07/2014, 17:42).

narrator chooses as the epigraph of part I the following biblical reference to Adam: "The Lord God fashioned Adam from the dust of the earth and blew the spirit of life into his nostrils so that Adam became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)." The idea is to establish a parallel in creation. However, as Adam is said to be the father of humanity, Anubi is the founding father of the Tuareg. The idea of introducing the story and events with a parallel to the Bible is carried on to part II. Here, Anubi lives through torture, loss and metamorphosis in the desert, like the Biblical prophets. The hardships and damnation are foreshadowed by the opening biblical epigraph

> He said to Adam: "since you have hearkened to the words of your life and eaten from the tree I warned you to shun, saying, 'don't eat from it,' you have brought down a curse upon the earth. You will need to toil everyday of your life to wrest a living from it, and it will reward your efforts with thorns and briars. You will eat the grass of the field. By the sweat of your brow will you have bread to eat, until you return to the earth from which you sprang, because you are dirt and to the dirt you return. (Genesis 3: 17-19)."[504]

In this part of the story, Anubi experiences loss after he sinned and killed a priest. He "brought down a curse upon the earth" and so his being is reduced into an animal state and reaches death of thirst. Blinded by the physical need to drink, Anubi is driven by an animal instinct to the piss of gazelles and drank from it. Then, a final awareness of the triviality of life comes to the protagonist just before his murder by his son. The idea is introduced by the biblical quote:

[504] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 49.

> Then I reflected on all the works of my hands and all the toil I had exerted in my labor. In truth, all was vanity and a grasping at the wind, for there is nothing to be gained under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 2: 11).[505]

The reference to wind and sun echoes the text of Alkoni as they are the agents of the desert. The story of Anubi echoes the story of Jesus in their being fatherless, they build a spiritual legacy, and they are founding fathers. These are few analogies that show the sources of Alkoni's work. More direct references within the body of the novels are: Cain in *The Bleeding of the Stone* or the Ecclesiastes' prayers Assouf recites for fear from falling down in the "wholes." The story of Assouf ends with a reference to the Bible as a pray of death: "at the moment great drops of rain began to beat on its windows, washing away, too, the blood of the man crucified on the surface of the rock."[506] As a voice from the desert of Ghadames, Assouf prays from Koran to Bible and talk in Sufi verses. Assouf and Alkoni join "Help Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men. (Psalms, 12:1)"

In addition, the lost oasis "Targa" or "Waw" plays the same role of the Promised Land, and continues to be the focus of different novels by Alkoni, where characters express their eternal desire to behold it and mix their words with sorrow and nostalgia. Greed is one of the sins that Cain and Dodo embody. Lust is Wan Teehay's and Ablaq's sin. Thus, Alkoni uses the biblical references at different levels of the narration, language and events. In this way, Alkoni draws different tangled narrative circles that overlap to create a text where religions cohabit peacefully with one another, with history and mythology. He fabricates a layout of a narrative crowded by the techniques

[505] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 97.

[506] Alkoni, *BS*, 135.

of intertextuality, foreshadowing, back shadowing and digressions; all novelistic features that assert the magical richness of the text.

Another spiritual voice related to these religions is also whispered in Alkoni's stories: the Sufi influence. "[Sufis are] drunk without wine; sated without food; distraught; foodless and sleepless; a king beneath a humble cloak; a treasure within a ruin; not of air and earth; not of fire and water; a sea without bounds. He has a hundred moons and skies and suns. He is wise through universal truth- not a scholar from a book."[507]

A Sufi interpretation of the desert

One of the aims in this section is to give another instance of magical realism as a North African phenomenon in the writings of Ibrahim Alkoni. Yet, however different Alkoni is, his association with the "margins" of the world is not doubted. He is the Arabic speaking Berber, from the North African desert, who experiments with a widely recognised literary genre. In the three novels, there are numerous instances of mystical encounters between European explorers (who stand for realism) and desert characters (who stand for magic) that fill the text with magical realist tone. Mystic or Sufi doctrines are based on the notions of love and the Beloved. Sufi language, in describing the relationship of the worshipper to his worshipped, goes beyond the religious register and stems in poetry and philosophy. This part shows how Sufi quest for the "beloved" resembles Alkoni's traveller into the North African desert, also, to pinpoint to the references to Sufis and a use of Sufi language in Alkoni's novels.

[507] Jalaludine Rumi, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/journals/ia/sfrv3.htm>.

For Sufis language is dealt with from two perspectives: the "apparent" and proved on the one side; and the symbolic, the hidden and discovered, on the other. In addition, Sufis prefer the language of symbols and signs to the language in its first layer of meaning, when they describe their experience and their "spiritual showdown."[508]

They mean by the outwardly or the apparent, the situational language in its human dimension; while the inwardly or the hidden sign is the deepest significance of language which is the language of "gods." In fact, Alkoni's texts are built on the indicative and the symbolic linguistic systems; this means that the language used, in the Arabic version of his novels, follows Sufis' terminology and concepts. Like Sufis, Alkoni's characters face a journey that often has a spiritual dimension and a physical movement.

Alkoni's novels reveal a Sufi vision and imitate Sufi texts. Characters speak a Sufi language. Their adoration of an element of the desert (an extended synecdoche over the stories) is similar to the one Sufis express perpetually in their prayers, meditations, poems, songs, circular dances or whirling, and philosophy. Muhydin Ibn Arabi defines adoration,

> O marvel! A garden amidst fires! My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks, and a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Ka'ba and the tables of the Tora and the book of the Koran. I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith.[509]

The quest for the beloved is echoed by Anubi's quest for the father. Anubi's language is Sufi, though it is mostly lost in translation that tends to render

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[508] Idris Shah, *The Sufis*, <http://www.nooonbooks.com/reader/pdf/index/bookId/2215/hash/c7dacceacc59a45cc2d9b407c109599491c54de7757e85b9c39e9b0b36b91a42/#page/4/mode/1u>, (22/09/2014, 14:20), 86.

[509] Muhydin Ibn Arabi, *Tarjuman Al-ashwaq,* 87, <http://www.sufism.ir/books/download/english/ibn-arabi-en/tarjoman-alashvagh.pdf> (22/09/2014, 15:20).

the Arabic style to a more understandable European tone. He describes his quest for the "secret's truth" as such

> When the clearly demarcated horizon split with the first effusion of the flood of light, the nakedness uniting the realms of the upper and lower world were sundered and the last remnants of the darkness cloaking the desert world dissipated. Then I passed into the spirit world to witness the miracle: to see the secret smile, the genuine smile I was destined never again to see as I saw it that day. I was destined, likewise, never to forget it.[510]

The reference to daylight or the experience of *muthul* or "manifestation" and *ittihad* or "union," shows the use of a Sufi language in the protagonist's interpretation of the desert's signs. Anubi looks for his father but Assouf follows his father's path in the desert after his experience in "The Pit" that Alkoni opens with Sufi verses

> Fulfillment springs from patience.
>
> Patience springs from power.
>
> Power springs from authority.[511]
>
> (Al-Niffari, "Fulfillment")

Assouf's and Ukhayyad's languages are less embedded in the Sufi diction than Anubi's. Though in *The Bleeding of the Stone,* Assouf speaks of Sufi mosques and Sufi ideas that are controlling the spiritual scene at that time, his tone is rather critical. For instance, when he is transformed into a *waddan* that helps him to escape from the Italian concentration camps; Sufis think he is a saint. The narrator describes them

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[510] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 4.

[511] Ibrahim Alkoni, *The Pit*, <http://www.nooonbooks.com/reader/pdf/index/bookId/2215/hash/c7dacceacc59a45cc2d9b407c109599491c54de7757e85b9c39e9b0b36b91a42/#page/4/mode/1u>, (22/09/2014, 14:20), 1.

> The wise oasis Sufis, enraptured, rocked their heads from side to side and threw incense into the fire, convinced one and all that this man is a saint of God. That evening they went to the Sufi mosque and celebrated a dhikr through the night in praise of God and in homage to the saint, filled with joy that the divine spirit should have come to dwell in a wretched creature of this world. […]. Had the Sufi dervishes, in their vision of the holiness of God's spirit incarnate, read the secrets of the unknown?[512]

Judging Assouf's transformation by a divinity act is for Assouf himself a misunderstanding of desert's secrets. Yet it is an interpretation of what they see. There is another reference to Sufis by another character that embodies Western intervention in the region and Western understanding of the desert.

John Parker, a captain at the Hweilis base, studies Sufism and discovers the difference between the "Arab East" treatment and the North African approach to Sufism. He is fascinated by the unnamed French writer, when he declares that North African Sufis take the philosophy of the Middle East down to earth: "there was no difference between God in heaven and the poor vagabond on earth, so long as God Himself was prepared to take up His abode in such holy fools."[513] In this part of the novel, the narrator exposes the way the American captain interprets Sufism and channels them into his own concerns. So the "obscure Sufi traveller" observes

> The truth lies in gazing beasts. In gazelles God has placed the secret and sown the meaning. For him who tastes the flesh of this creature, all impotence of the soul will be swept away, the veil of separation will be rent, and he will see God as he truly is.[514]

[512] Alkoni, *BS*, 127.

[513] Alkoni, *BS*, 89.

[514] Alkoni, *BS*, 106.

After knowing the *Tijani*[515] and *Qadiri*[516] sects, John compares Sufism to Buddhism to search for a better understanding of what he describes as obscure. All that he keeps in mind is the flesh part of the obscure discourse. That is his interest. For the sake of understanding Sufism and grasp from the knowledge of the desert, he joins Cain in his massacre of gazelles. After his greedy quest within Cain's desert, for John, Sufism continues to be obscure and he becomes addicted to meat, "but what could he do? Gazelle meat was like opium. Once a man tastes it, he got used to it; and once he'd got used to it, he'd go mad without it!"[517] Alkoni, here, analogically speaks of gazelle, like gold dust or oil, is one of the rare products of the desert, and he, who gets used to it go mad without it.

Anubi is one of Alkoni's characters, who embody the desert. The quality of the quest through the desert and his behaviour are similar to the Sufi aspirant *murid* or trader *salik*. He is the consort of desert creatures: *jinns*, gazelles, mirage, visions, myths and prophecies. Anubi's desert is ancient and dates back before Sufis and their doctrines are inspired from space. However, apart from all these references to the desert, Sufi presence affects the structure of the stories in the act of travelling. With regard to the spiritual path, the journey, for the Sufis, is steeped in symbolism. Sufis invite to walk the earth in order to decipher its signs. According to Abu Al-Hassan Al Farissi's legacy (VIII-IX) the journey is a condition to be Sufi. To Al Farissi, travelling is metaphoric and meant to observe and draw lessons. Usually the journey's goal is the "essence of God."[518] The idea of the journey as a search for the origin is enacted in Anubi's quest for his father, in the tribe's wander

[515] For further reference see <http://www.tijani.org/> (26/09/2014, 15:46).

[516] For further reference see <http://www.qadiri-rifai.org/> (26/09/2014, 16:12).

[517] Alkoni, *BS*, 111.

[518] Muhydin Ibn Arabi, *Tarjuman Al-ashwaq*, 82, <http://www.sufism.ir/books/download/english/ibn-arabi-en/tarjoman-alashvagh.pdf> (22/09/2014, 15:20).

and mourns for the lost oasis or Targa and in the voyage for the lost paradise Waw. This makes of the tread in Alkoni's novels as the kernel and the motif that moves the characters and arouses their feelings. They become eternal travellers who enhance the belief in stability. It is a quest for the "absolute" or *mutlaq* and the "abstract" or *mujarad*. It is a search for origins, truth symbolized by Targa or the lost patry. It functions as an ancient call for the immanent truth *al-haq* as did the Sufis who cross "establishments" or *manazil*, "stages," "shrines" or *maqamat* and "isthmus" or *barazikh* for the sake of revelation or *mukashafa* and "unveiling" or *raf'u al-hijab*.

In Anubis, this similarity can be seen in spiritual scenes such as the prophecy that tells: "You should set forth, because from today on, you are a shadow charged with care of the shadows that burden the earth. Then I heard them sing in unison about longing, using the tune "Saho," which speaks of the exile of the clan in ancient days."[519] The journey and the search for the most desired place is also perpetuated. The Sufi voice is revealed in such words, as 'unison' and 'longing,' the idea of exile from the living world to retreat into the dead one is one way of refusing the material world and profit principles.

> We are all children of a desert labyrinth. […]. Thus entertainment slays us, just as others are slain by longing. One group dies from the offense of playing, master, and another group dies from the disease of longing.[520]

Themes of loss, the world as 'labyrinth,' infinite longing, disease of longing are common to Sufi doctrines, even though there are slight differences. The beloved for the Sufi traveller is God, but what one observes in the texts is the feeling and the labour to search for the desired that becomes another thing with Alkoni. Anubi says, "My heart's effusion, however, proved the more powerful impetus and the suzerainty of longing the stronger, because I

[519] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 110.

[520] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 147.

learnt from my struggle that man's exterior is a shadow, and his interior longing, a longing that stirs only when the spirit world dispatches it as messenger to notify us of our true nature."[521] In Anubis, the beloved is the father, then the lost oasis and last solitude. In his desert ever-lasting aphorisms, Anubi says, "the body is our exterior, which we ought to conceal. The spirit is our interior, which we ought to display."[522] This duality body and spirit is extended over space in, "for the body, the desert is a place of exile, whereas for the spirit, the desert is a paradise."[523] The spiritism of Alkoni is celebrated by many critics, Susan Mchugh is among them, when she admits

> Amid a story in which the herdsman comes to believe he was born to protect this severely endangered species, and in the end gets slaughtered in place of the animal when he refuses to show hunters where to find it, al-Koni introduces a curious flight-line with this momentary image of the hybrid human-animal fleeing the scene of historic mass killings. […]. Comparing several similar moments across al-Koni's fictions, this essay outlines a pattern in which hybrid figures are used to evoke ancient animist belief systems in order to develop a unique critical perspective on state-sanctioned slaughter.[524]

Mchugh puts emphasis on the writer's belief in the spirit of desert elements that outsiders see as void. He creates by that a world beyond the realistic one, an unseen habitat with magical open to interpretation life in the desert. Muchugh supports this claim in her seeing in Alkoni the patron of

> this trend toward interpreting animist figures and events strictly in terms of metaphors for the human nonetheless betrays a curiously studied

[521] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 129.

[522] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 174.

[523] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 172.

[524] Mchugh, *Hybrid,* 293.

> ignorance of what not so long ago were readily dismissed as the simplistic hallmarks of primitive forms like legends and folktales.[525]

As any work drawing on the tradition of legends and folktales, Alkoni's novels, in general, are built on the confrontation of the opposites: good and evil, solitude and community.

As the narrator defines these opposites, in *The Maggie*, "the genius penetration, union, vanishing and birth; to penetrate things and to unite with beings." Solitude is the state of many of Alkoni's characters: Assouf, Ukhayyad and Anubi. Assouf, like his father, finds in the empty spaces his peaceful shelter. Ukhayyad ruins his life by leaving the desert to live in the oasis that is an easy target to invaders. Anubi finds peace in solitude that becomes part of his being, "I was prowling through the cave of the ancestors in the southern mountain range […]."[526] The journey is a leitmotif in Alkoni's novels, in general. It is a condition in the Sufi doctrine that is important in the well-established process as a rite a Sufi apprentice should go through to enter the other dimension of the "original." In Alkoni, there is a recurrent movement in the desert as a way to free its Bedouins from the "place" as settlement. For desert people, in Alkoni's novels, settling means subdue oneself to materialism, which is the condition for life in the "oasis." The oasis is the city, in the desert; its growth and expansion depend on wealth, which is different from desert's life as based on the necessity to survive.

In the novels chosen in this part on Alkoni's interpretation of the desert, Sufism is present in language, attitude and the practice of the different rites. Assouf's father has hymns or *muwwals* to uproot life from its triviality towards a transcendental level. Assouf's prayers make of the desert a

[525] Mchugh, *Hybrid,* 295.

[526] Mchugh, *Hybrid,* 114.

spiritual space or a temple where the lover or *al-murid* could adore his Beloved.

The symbolic ascension on a symbolic scale or *Maraj* is a way to perish and to witness or *mushahadah* the divine manifestation and materialization *tajalli ilahi*. It is like a voluntary near-death experience that the characters pass through to unveil truth. Concerning the journey and ascension, Muhyyaddine Ibn Arabi argues: "the human being, in his ascension witnesses the divine sign depending on his own scale of ascension."[527]

The journey in *Gold Dust* is an example of the Sufi presence in Alkoni's text. The journey covers fifteen pages and starts after Ukhayyad gives *Assiyar* to Ablaq to cure him from the disease that had invested his skin after a sexual intercourse with a female camel. The herb is rather strong and it drives Ablaq to lose his self-control and start to run through the desert towards lost and death. So Ukhayyad cinches a cord around his body and secures it to the back of the Marhi that starts to run. Moving around, Ukhayyad becomes frantic and talks to the desert about his fears that *jinn* would take his Ablaq from him, encouraging Ablaq to have patience. Then he talks to his Lord and prays him not to take Ablaq from him. He goes on saying

> The Mahri bolted, snatching Ukhayyad up off the ground. The camel galloped across the empty waste. Together they ran. […] the camel rushed for that mountain. He crossed the plain thick with wild grasses, climbed a ridge, then plunged into a valley crowded with lote trees. There, he flew into a thicket of thorns, shredding his body. More and more blood began to flow. […]. The furious chase continued. Ukhayyad dripped with sweat, and panted for breath. Blood poured from his arms and legs. For this part, the Mahri was drenched in a lather of sweat, pus, and blood. […]. He could no longer feel his body, breath, of limbs. The pain had even consumed all sense

[527] Ibn Arabi, *Tarjuman*, 42.

> of pain. […]. Ukhayyad sprang up and ran, scaling the ridge on all fours, still holding onto the reins. His lungs were splitting, his lambs tearing up. […]. He marshalled everything in him that was manly, brave, and noble, he recalled all the stories of heroism he could and rushed across the slope. He flew downhill, falling, then getting back up in the blink of an eye. He fell and did not fall.[528]

During the journey, Ukhayyad loses blood, sweat and saliva; but he clings to his "most loyal friend" hoping to die or to be safe together. His ordeal is both an initiation rite of sacrificing one's own blood and a Sufi union with the beloved. In his unawareness of the dangers he is running, Ukhayyad forgets the eternal enemy in the desert: "thirst immortal power of the desert."[529] However, his pains are not important, what is important is that the friend does not escape. On pain Rumi sings

> How much the Beloved made me suffer before the Work
>
> Grew entwined inseparably with blood and eyes!
>
> A thousand grim fires and heartbreaks
>
> And its name is "Love"
>
> A thousand pains and regrets and attacks
>
> And its name is "Beloved"...
>
> Heartbreak is a treasure because it contains mercies
>
> The kernel is soft when the rind is scraped off;
>
> O Brother, the place of darkness and cold
>
> Is the fountain of life and the cup of ecstasy.[530]

[528] Alkoni, *GD*, 37-40.

[529] Alkoni, *GD*, 40.

[530] Betty Smith, Sufism: On Joy and Pain, (the International Journal of Healing and Caring), <http://www.wholistichealingresearch.com/81smith.html> (20/12/2014, 12:44), 4.

The quote from the Sufi poet Rumi shows Ukhayyad's inclination to love, cherish and perish for the beloved. He shows also a great ability to be grateful in the presence of pain as an integral part of the living process. To choose avoiding this pain would be choosing to have not loved or lived at all. Similarly, Sufi mystics see "pain as essential to purification and as essential to the alchemical transformation of the dull human mind and heart into their secret gold."[531] The journey reaches its peak when the Mahri's and Ukhayyad's skinless bodies meet in a moment of a union by blood and a desire to survive.

> He stretched out over the camel's back, gluing himself to the wet flesh. The red flesh was sticky to his touch, the blood not yet dry. Ukhayyad's body, now also naked, fused with the viscous flesh of the Mahri. Flesh met flesh, blood mixed with blood.in the past they have been merely friends. Today, they had been joined by a much stronger tie. Those who become brothers by sharing blood are closer than those who share parentage.[532]

The Sufi poets, for the most part, write about the union with the Eternal in the terms applied to their beloved. The expressions they used are sensuous, but they infer in the sensuous other dimensions of brave, strong strivings and fraught with much spiritual fervour. The devout and sincere Sufi calls God "the Eternal Darling" or sings about the Beloved's curls. In studying Sufi poetry and Alkoni's language, one must remember that Eastern poetry is essentially erotic in expression, but just as essentially symbolic in meaning.

One may reasonably infer that Rumi's intense poetic temperament becomes more fascinating after meeting the magnetic and powerful friend Shams.[533]

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[531] Smith, Sufism, 3.

[532] Alkoni, *GD*, 47.

[533] Shams' first encounter with Rumi: On 15 November 1244, a man in a black suit from head to toe, came to the famous inn of Sugar Merchants of Konya. His name was Shams Tabrizi. He was claiming to be a travelling merchant. As it was said in Haji Bektash Veli's book, "Makalat", he was looking for something. Which he was going to find in Konya. Eventually he found Rumi riding a horse. The first encounter is this: In the marketplace of Konya, amid the cotton stalls, sugar vendors, and vegetable stands, Rumi rode through

The very treatment of this friendship is the subject of Lyrical Poems and in the Masnaviis Sufi. The following quotations talk about the union in friendship and as a long path for the Sufi:

> ASPIRATION
>
> Haste, haste! For we too, soul, are coming
>
> From this world of severance to that world of
>
> Union.
>
> THE CALL Of THE BELOVED
>
> …
>
> Thousands sank wounded on this path, to whom
>
> There came not
>
> A breath of the fragrance of Union, a token from
>
> The neighbourhood of the Friend.[534]

Rumi sings about the Divine Rose-Garden in his "Our journey is to the Rose-Garden of Union," emphasising the roses that fade and the human hearts that ache. It is through pain and agony that a Sufi achieves union with the Beloved. In addition, Alkoni's protagonists echo with their friends and truly loved animals-companions. The Sufi poet and the Sufi novelist sing of the soul's longing to be united with the Beloved. The latter differs in shape or name but remains beloved anyway.

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the street, surrounded by his students. He cried out, fell to the ground, and lost consciousness for one hour. Shams, upon hearing these answers, realized that he was face to face with the object of his longing, the one he had prayed God to send him. When Rumi awoke, he took Shams's hand, and the two of them returned to Rumi's school together on foot. They secluded themselves for forty days, speaking to no one. After several years with Rumi in Konya, Shams left and settled in Khoy. As the years passed, Rumi attributed more and more of his own poetry to Shams as a sign of love for his departed friend and master, <http://jamilahammad.com/rumiandshams/thestory.htm>.

[534] Davis Hadland, *Wisdom Of The East The Persian Mystics Jalalu'd-Din Rumi*, (John Murray, London: 1912), 48-50.

In the previous pages, the journey is read from a Sufi perspective. In the following part, the quest in the desert and other elements of Alkoni's novels are approached from a mythical vista. For this reason, our next endeavour is to show Alkoni's interpretation of myth.

The Eternal Return of North African Myths

This conclusive part of the present study examines how Alkoni's fiction is expressive of his main interest in the North African desert, and scrutinizes the important questions of Alkoni's hybrid narrative as a mirror to the role of space in redefining the literary genre, the reconstruction of identity, and the representation of the desert of the twentieth century Maghreb.

In one of his interviews, Alkoni tells a journalist that his protagonists are different faces that constitute and construct the identity of the desert people. Alkonis' life quest in the North African space and literature brings into prominence the theme of encounters between and fusion with the native culture. As his protagonists, Alkoni's chooses the Maghreb and focuses on its desert. When he was young, he experienced the place in its authentic state then, from his Western places he tries to reconstruct it in his texts. From the beginning, Alkoni recreates tradition from a mythical perspective and by doing so, he enters the debate novel and epic as we referred to in previous pages. In his fiction, one explores the Maghreb from the perspective of the ancient and timeless elements.

Living in or crossing the desert is a "new" theme in Arabic fiction that implies a rereading of the genre itself so as to highlight the identity of desert people. In Alkoni's novels, there is a recurring theme, an initiatory journey that takes place in the act of crossing of the desert. The role of nature in exercising sufferance on the traveller is increased to amplify the role of the journey in a spiritual nurture that stimulates resistance and initiates the reborn protagonist for his ultimate ordeal. Therefore, nature and characters seem to work together and depend on one another to achieve perfect harmony.

Nature, here the desert, has a motherly role in giving birth to the child through violence, pain and sufferance.

This relationship with nature can sometimes become intimate, more physical and metaphorical, as in Ukhayyad's communion with Ablaq, which in the Crossing, has a sensual experience to report in a skinless embracing long journey that ends in a well, a symbolic mother womb. This aspect of symbiosis with nature becomes transcendence.

The relationship of man to the native desert is crucial and vital link of the novels. The path the characters take, during their lives, usually ends with their death and return to the earth's womb. There is always a physical return to the desert earth. If this concept of initiation and suffering is important, it is however complemented by the original stage, which also strengthens the link to the homeland. The homeland is desert, void, harsh and dry. In fact, in Alkoni's texts, a contention takes place between desert and water, as oasis, mirage, vision, flood, and mother womb. It is the metaphor of the origin back to nature and to the first being.

Water stands for life, fertility and prosperity. In the desert, water is the dream to survive in the long walk through wilderness. Water element and in particular its absence, thirst, and floods are kernel motifs in Alkoni's novels, linked to the idea of rebirth in the natural womb of the desert. Beyond this myth of origin, Alkoni's novels propose another representation of the origin associated with a much more positive form of rebirth. For instance, the idea of bathing, drinking and coming back to life is seen in Ukhayyad's "bottomless well" experience before which he starts losing his senses,

> He stumbled, stupefied, trying to locate the Mahri's neck, then head. He wanted to tell the camel something before he plunged into the bottomless well. At that peculiar moment, he thought about what Sheikh Musa said about death: it was closer than your jugular vein and yet farther than the

> ends of the earth. He wanted to tell the piebald this. He wanted to tell him what to do as he plunged into the abyss. The piebald lavished the young man with attention, covering him with his lips and licking his face. Ukhayyad was unable to see the other's eyes and unable to utter a word. He had lost the ability to speak. First he had lost his voice. He raised his right hand and patted the Mahri's head [...].[535]

Before plunging to bath and heal, Ukhayyad enacts his gradual loss of his senses as a way of approaching death or a near-death experience, essential for initiation and rebirth. Drawing from the notion of initiation from the abyss, this ritual represents amniotic diving combining origin and amniotic environment as a symbolic return to the origins of the world. Thus, in *Gold Dust*, this ritual is associated with a particular experience that belongs to primordial times.

This healing experience takes into the novel, a mythical tone since, as Mircea Eliade suggests, this type of ritual immersion is a common process

> To restore health, were in the presence of the patient process of the world, refreshes the emergence of the first humans in the Earth. This is because this makes present and active anthropogony [...] the patient back to health: he feels in his inner process essential emersion. In other words, it becomes contemporary cosmology and anthropogony.[536]

To Eliade, any ritual of immersion produces the feeling of having been born out of the Earth. This notion reinforces a sense of autochthony, which is interpreted as the sensation that belongs to "people of the place."[537] It is a place in the heart of nature that takes the value of the mother womb and is perceived as a refuge. The experience of this type is found in many of Alkoni's

[535] Alkoni, *GD*, 50.

[536] Eliade, *Sacred*, 200.

[537] Eliade, *Sacred*, 203.

novels, in which the protagonist is found in a ravine in the heart of which source is of amniotic properties.

Thus, we can see in these experiments described in the novels another type of mythical dimension, by a return to the origins of desert land, essential to the notion of identity. Indeed, for this dive and return, characters manifest solidarity with the homeland against the belief of emptiness and aridity. This relationship is at the heart of the primordial nature, which is like an ancient mother, directly related to the past against which the characters seek to measure themselves. This would bring this symbolic journey towards a "pre-existing" experience of Anubi and Assouf, who symbolically metamorphose into an animal, being aware of their own identity. In this prospect, myth as the most important magical realist feature of Alkoni's novels is going to be the focus of the following pages.

This almost carnal relationship with the mother and mother earth is so important that it is also evidenced by specific Berber rituals inherited from African traditions, often described in the novels. The protagonists identify themselves with animals specific to the desert: *waddan*, gazelle, snake and Mahri. They preserve ancient rocks and talk to their predecessors in the form of *jinns*. They use the masks of these animals as their ancient fathers tell of the ancient stones. In addition, they sacrifice themselves in the open-temple space to recreate myths.

Thus, if most of the characters do not remember Targa, their original homeland, though some reject or materialise it by fantasy and dreams, many of them have essential links with the spiritual homeland. The desert as a realistic enclave and a mystical primordial space becomes a place of rebirth and acceptance of origin.

For Eliade, there are different ways to turn back in time to witness the fabled time of beginnings or the creation time. One can live progressively one's origins passing from the present time to the absolute beginning. It is a symbolic return that allows the recovery of a time that precedes the birth of the actual world, and then to achieve a rebirth through specific rites. In fact, it is the main mythic feature of *The Bleeding of the Stone*. The different characters meet around the historical stones of the valley or *wadi* Matkhandoush. This stone, as the story narrates, is a symbol of the beginning of humanity,

> The mighty rock marked the end of a series of caves, standing there like a cornerstone. Through thousands of years it had faced the merciless sun, adorned with the most wondrous paintings ancient man had made anywhere in the Sahara. There was the giant priest depicted over the full height of the rock, hiding his face behind that mysterious mask. His hand touched the *waddan* that stood there alongside him, its air both dignified and stubborn, its head raised, like the priest's, towards the far horizon where the sun rose to pour its rays each day on their faces.[538]

This ritual description of the priest and the *waddan* summarises the history of the desert by taking its readers to the world in its beginnings. Matkhandoush is the happy beginning of time when the ancestors lived their "first existence" in their "lost paradise".

Assouf, whose name in Touareg means " الوحشة او الصحراء ,"[539] is the first character that appears in that lost place. He is a simple shepherd who decides to exile himself from the rest of human race and to dwell in a mythical happiness. Myth allows him to befriend desert animals and to belong to its stones and sands. He believes that ancient inhabitants of the

[538] Alkoni, *BS*, 2.

[539] Alkoni, *Maggie I,* 477, "wilderness or Sahara."[translation mine].

caves were his ancestors and he likes to stay where they witnessed peace. In his dream of life, Assouf, through isolation, recovers the myth of creation. He is absorbed by his mythical world to the point of praying in the sense of the stone figure towering above his head" instead of Ka'aba.[540] On the stone as knowledge, Eliade affirms "For those to whom a stone reveals itself as sacred, its immediate reality is transmuted into supernatural reality. In other words, for those who have a religious experience all nature is capable of revealing itself as cosmic sacrality."[541]

The second character that the novel presents just after Assouf is an Italian archaeologist, who lives, like Assouf, in the same mythical dimension of the world. He is so attracted to the stone that Assouf

> […] often wondered just what lay behind the Christians' interest in the ancient paintings. He decided, finally, they must be making pilgrimage to the Matkhndoush figures because they belonged to the same old religion; they didn't after all, believe in the Prophet Muhammad, or kneel facing the Ka'aba as Muslims did. Veneration, and supplication and surrender, were revealed in their eyes; betrayed too by the odd way their hands moved over their faces as they examined the vast figure of the king of the wadi, and his sacred waddan that rose alongside him, contemplating the far horizon. The Christians stood before the masked giant exactly as Muslims stood before God. And yet his father had told him this masked jinni was his ancestor too.[542]

These Western visitors are most generous and most interested in the stones. The Italians, who represent both the coloniser in *The Bleeding of the Stone* and the artists, stand for both death and life at the same time. The archaeologist is the figure who adores the stone and secures its safety;

[540] Alkoni, *BS*, 7.

[541] Eliade, *Sacred*, 128.

[542] Alkoni, *BS*, 10.

sharing Assouf's desire for living in that mythical world, is the counter figure to the Italian army that massacred desert people and from whom Assouf escapes in the transformation scene.

The first Muslim to visit Assouf is Cain in company of his friend Massoud. Cain is interested in *waddan*'s meat after declaring that he is "proud to say I personally ate the last gazelle in the northern desert."[543] He shares nothing with Assouf who never eats meat, while Cain never slept without eating meat. Later in the novel, the narrator tells how Cain killed his own parents, then his sister whom he ate. He was the orphan that fed a gazelle. The stone for him is like the sand, mere futile nature. He ironically says: "the sights, […] what business do we have with sights? We're sights ourselves, don't you know that? […]. Have you ever seen a sight interested in other sights?"[544] His only target is *waddan's* meat.

Another interesting character is the American John Parker, who studied Chinese and Indian philosophy at university and added Sufism to his knowledge; then uses all his mighty technology to stop desert animals from being isolated, defying their natural instinct of escaping. He shares Cain's obsession with *waddan's* meat and enjoys chasing in the desert.

These characters meet in the desert. They have different backgrounds and different interests. The closest to myth is Assouf. As a child, Assouf was taught by his father to respect Waddans and never hunting them. Nevertheless, with the war and famine, Assouf betrays his promise to his father and starts following the *waddan*. He ties a cord on the animal's neck and surrenders to the drive of the animal that takes him to the top of the mountain and throws him there for a long moonless night between death

[543] Alkoni, *BS,* 14.

[544] Alkoni, *BS*, 13.

and life. At the end, Assouf sees a cord and recognises the one he put around the *waddan's* neck. The *waddan* saves him, while he sees in Waddan's eyes his father's face. Before he loses consciousness, Assouf shouts: "you are my father. I recognised you. Wait. I want to tell you…"[545]

This is a rebirth scene, like the one of Ukhayyad out of his skin and entering Earth's womb, the well. Eliade argues:

> It is only in initiation that death is given a positive value. More than an empty tomb, death becomes also the womb of change. In dreams and dramas of initiation, death represents change for the entire psyche and life of a person. It means change inside and out, not simple adaptation or switch in "life style." Initiation includes death and rebirth, a radical altering of a person's "mode of being" […] Without conscious rituals of loss and renewal, individuals and societies lose the capacity to experience the sorrows and joy that are essential for feeling fully human[…].[546]

In this respect, Eliade's view tells of a need to look back to ancestral rituals of birth and death in terms of "change and renewal" and learn how these rituals benefited the community or individual. Indeed, Assouf is reborn and changes his natural father by a mythical one. Gilbert Durand describes this change of the father showing how having the 'son' is considered people's way to control mortality and to win over time, while in myth there is a doubling of fathers by adding a mythical father to the natural one. The latter has a common background while the first has sacred origins. [547] Indeed, Assouf has two fathers. The mythical father is the *waddan* to whom Assouf promises not to eat meat anymore. He does not belong to the modern world of Cain who lives in greed and pleasure.

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[545] Alkoni, *BS*, 71.

[546] Mircea Eliade, *Rites & Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth & Rebirth*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 8.

[547] Gilbert Durand, *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*, (Dunod: Paris, 1960), 284.

Waddan is presented by Alkoni in the notes of the novel as a sacred creature. No one knows how the narrator arrived to the conclusion of the superiority of this animal. What is clear, however, from Alkoni's approach is the importance of this animal for Touareg. In Tassili paintings[548], Henri Lhote notes how moufflon or *waddan* plays a central role in the ancient population's creeds, as the cave paintings repeatedly show representations of a glorified and huge *waddan* […]. Hunting moufflon has also many complex rituals, like putting a heavy rock or a *waddan* mask on their heads, singing specific magical verses and keeping the hunt as secret to avoid *jinns'* anger.[549]

Waddan's place is mountain tops and gazelle's is the sandy plain. Desert animals respect their spaces and if one disobeys desert rules, he should pone an end to his life. This is what happened to Assouf's father's *waddan*. Assouf's father "Waited until the moon had risen, then told Assouf how the *waddan* was the spirit of the mountains."[550]

> I forgot to tell you that our battle happened in a wadi well away from the mountains. The waddan knew he couldn't escape because he was so far from his mountain stronghold. In the middle of the wadi there was a small hill covered with high, smooth rocks. When he saw I'd taken my rifle, he climbed the rocks in a single swift movement, then leaped to the ground and broke his neck. The blood gushed out from his nostrils, and, after he was dead, his eyes were open and that strange look was still there—the mixture of wretchedness and rancor and helplessness.[551]

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[548] Tassili n'Ajjer Located in a strange lunar landscape of great geological interest, this site has one of the most important groupings of prehistoric cave art in the world. More than 15,000 drawings and engravings record the climatic changes, the animal migrations and the evolution of human life on the edge of the Sahara from 6000 BC to the first centuries of the present era. The geological formations are of outstanding scenic interest, with eroded sandstones forming 'forests of rock', <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/179>.

[549] Henri Lhote*. The Search for the Tassili Frescoes: The story of the prehistoric rock-paintings of the Sahara*, (London, 1973), 154.

[550] Alkoni, *BS*, 21.

[551] Alkoni, *BS*, 20.

Nevertheless, the fight between *waddan* as a single mountainous animal and gazelles as bundle plain animals takes the reader to a mythic war between two deserts. Waiting again for the moon to cross the sky, Assouf's father tells the story:

> Once long ago, the mountain desert waged constant war with the sandy desert, and the heavenly gods would descend to earth to separate the pair, calming the fire enmity between them. But no sooner had the gods left the battlefield, and the rains stopped pouring down, than war would break once more between the two eternal enemies. One day, the gods grew angry in their high heavens and sent down their punishment on the fighters. They froze the mountains in Massak Satfat, and they stopped the persistent advance of the sands on the borders of Massak Mallat. Then the sands found a way to enter the spirit of the gazelles, while the mountains found a way into the spirit of the waddan. And from that day on, the waddan was possessed by the spirit of the mountains.[552]

This story explains how the spirit of the mountains in *waddan* fights the spirit of the plain in gazelles.

In the name *waddan*, there is an evocation of ancient deity. The linguistic root of *waddan* is (w-d-d) which is an allusion to the desert Arabs' "father Wad," which is one of the many names of the moon. Libyans today cuddle one another by calling "waddy." Ancient Arabs called *wad* the moon and gazelle the sun. Indeed, the *waddan* is the "god" moon light and solitude; while the gazelle is the "god" of the sun and the power of community. *Waddan* is the North African desert hero, and the bull is his Arabian alternative.[553]

[552] Alkoni, *BS*, 21.

[553] Ghanemi, Elements, 5, [translation mine].

In his *Epic Ceilings: the Desert Imaginary in Ibrahim Alkoni's Literature*, Said Ghanemi introduces the circular timing in the desert. For desert people, daylight is blinding, the sun, heat and draught are enemies. As Ibn Manthour argues: [554]

العرب أنسوا بالقمر لأنهم يجلسون فيه للسهر، ويهديهم السبل في سرى الليل في السفر،
ويزيل عنهم وحشة الغاسق، وينم على المؤذي والطارق.

Moreover, it is believed that Western Semites, unlike Babylonians, worshipped the moon. In Arabic, for instance the moon is called: *wad, seen, shaheer, warakh, maqa*… In their prayers, they called it by *waddan aban*, for instance. Ali Jawad argues: "Jahilits[555] considered the moon as a father and was their favourite among other planets. It has become the god of gods, in particular for southern Arabs."[556] This place that the moon occupied in ancient history, imaginary and religion showed people's need of myth to control time. To Ghanemi, the poets of the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries continued the pagan song of the moon without a real consciousness of its origins. Over this time, the moon is depicted as a symbol of renewal and creation, in its continual death and rebirth. Durand emphasises the importance of the moon in Arabian myth, "La lune apparait en effet comme la premiere mesure du temps. […]. Comme l'ecrit Eliade en un important ouvrage consacre au *Mythe de l'Eternelle Retour*: "l'homme ne fait que repeater l'acte de la creation; son calendrier religieux commemore dans l'espace d'un an toutes les phases cosmogonyques qui ont lieu *ab origine*."[557] Thus for Durand, the moon is a way to measure the first time and a continual

[554] Ghanemi, *Epic*, 44, "the Arabs are interested in the moon because it gives them company in their nocturnal life; it indicates their ways during their travels by night; it makes them forget the heat during their long days; and it reveals the identity of the villain and the passers-by." [Translation mine].

[555] Jahilits are the pre-islamic populations.

[556] Ali Jawad, *Tarikh al-Arab Qabl al-Islam,* (Matba'al-Ilm al-Iraq, 1955), *The History of Arab before Islam,* <http://www.soundvision.com/info/seerah/hameed5.asp>, 51-7.

[557] Durand, Stuctures, 322-4.

promise of the return. Durand thinks of the role of the moon in following the natural changes of nature. He gives examples of the myth of moon's influence on the wind, the sea, the floods, renewal, birth and death. Both Durand and Eliade agree on the principle that the moon is the symbol for continual change and renewal, the moon is eternal and young.[558]

The moon is the father in these cultures. The father is often biologically fertile until his death which reflects the circular rebirth of the moon and its continual regenerated power. Once dead, the father lives as a symbol in Alkoni's desert. The way the moon is called *wad* refers to many Eastern gods, and mainly to the North African *waddan*-father. In Arabian myth, the moon is given the form of the bull that southern and western Semites "worshipped. They prayed kneeling in front of it; they fast few days every month in its honour; they offered sacrifices in the form of food and drinks; then they breakfast, danced and sang in its presence…"[559] this is so similar to Berber's *waddan*. In addition, *waddan* and bull take part in a group of animals that desert people called by "مراكب الجن,"[560] or the animals that represent the moon on earth such as snakes, lizards and rabbits.

The idea of the moon as the father of all the gods, humans and animals, leads to the understanding of fatherhood and its symbolism in these cultures. The moon is a symbolic father; it epitomises the notion of fatherhood. In this prospect, natural fathers aim at their children following them and hence, they defy death through them, in a circular time that insures their continual recreation. Ghanemi adds[561]

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[558] Durand, *Stuctures*, 348.

[559] Jawad, *History,* 55.

[560] Ghanemi, *Epic*, 47, "jinn's compound." [translation mine].

[561]Ghanemi, *Epic*, 48, "Time is not a linear succession of actions. It is rather a series of repeated actions that reproduce the "first action" in a circular movement of recovery. In Arabic time or Zaman is called daher

فليس الزمان هنا تتابعا خطيا للأفعال أو الآنات المتلاحقة، بل هو سلسلة من الأفعال التي تكرر "فعلا أوليا" يمكن استعادته دوريا. لقد أطلق العرب على الزمان اسم "الدهر"، وهي كلمة مشتقة من "الدور"، أي التكرار. بل ان ألفاظ الزمان الطبيعي تقلد هذا الزمن الأولي وتتبع مساره. فالسنة مشتقة من "سن" (القمر)، والشهر من شهر (الهلال)، والتاريخ من "ورخ"...

Indeed, both father and moon have crucial importance in Alkoni's stories. Generally, Alkoni's characters are desert people, Bedu, nomads, and exiled. They all share desert heritage of philosophy, art and aphorisms that enhance their belief in the circularity of time and space.

Among the three novels taken into account, *Anubis* tells best of fathers' stories, rebirth and circular timing. *Anubis: a Desert Novel* enacts and explores the myth of the desire to return to the point of origin, in the form of father and motherland. To Alkoni palimpsest of mythologems and meanings, we can fruitfully bring the light of Hans Blumenberg's and Mircea Eliade's works. Both Eliade and Blumenberg address the panhuman drive to mythmaking, specifically the desire to locate an origin story or creation myth, and trace a brief history of the circular myth of homecoming. Through Blumenberg's and Eliade's theoretical approaches, Alkoni's novel can be read as an interpretation of the myth of origins, which demonstrates and investigates the ways in which myth carries out imaginatively or symbolically the return Alkoni's desert characters believe in.

The very title *Anubis: a Desert Novel* foregrounds the fact of its mythic status, but as well as taking the form of myth; this novel makes claims about the nature of myth. Anubis in Egyptian myth is the jackal-headed man, the great judge of the dead, the funerary god, and the guardian of the corpus on its way

whose roots are dour or repetition. So the name of the year sana is from san or the moon, a month shaher or a crescent, history or tarikh is from warakh or the moon again…" [Translation mine].

to Afterlife. He is the secret son of Osiris and Nephthys. He wrapped Osiris' body in bandages and so he created the first mummy.

In order to collect scattered mythical and oral stories in Berber desert, Alkoni has carried out extensive research on the Anubis myth. He travelled through North African desert, visiting far-flung tribes to reach the leaders, elders and sages. He recorded everything that he was told, including deciphering the symbols in caverns with sages, piercing together narrative forms from several oral traditions. He gave a coherent shape to the stories while translating them from Berber into Arabic. He had long meetings with the matriarchs of the tribes of Ahaggar in Tamanghasset. Moreover, he received the translations of the very old form of the language offered by Timbuktu scholars.[562]

As the jackal-headed man from Egyptian mythology was Osiris' son, Anubi from Alkoni's novel does not know his father. His quest, in the novel, starts as a search for the father. The return to the origin is a central ideal in many archaic societies as one of the pillar rites of rebirth. He says, in the end of part one of the novel, "Cradle Talk": "I might experience a rebirth in the settlements of the land known as Targa."[563] The longing for origins assumes that any act coming after the authentic one is mere imitation of the ancestors in the first mythical time.[564] The sacredness of the forefathers from the creation time is recurrent in *Anubis,* where words such as "fathers" and "prophets." The Egyptian and Berber sons Anubis lost their fathers killed their fathers and roamed the desert. Their offspring are destined to

[562] Alkoni, *Anubis*, xv-xvii.

[563] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 47.

[564] Eliade, *Myth*, 34.

experience loss and deprival; but they carried on a tradition of renewing by evoking the father. He sings

> I struggled all my life to reach my eternal father in the higher world, but my father would only consent to appoint me his deputy in the lower world. I wrestled all my days to reach him in the heavens, but he chose to appoint me sovereign of a dirt-covered foothill over which roam the shades that burden the earth.[565]

One of the many terms that become significant through the novel is "prophecy," which is variously defined but appears chiefly as a protean form of meaningfulness beneath the level of the verbal. Prophecy is a way to bridge the gap between the reality of the momentous world and the ancestral symbolic dimension. It is also the discourse that unifies the gods to their common men; and once this latter achieves access to the prophecy he is uprooted from his humble origins to enter the realm of the superhuman, and so does Anubi. For instance, the word prophecy is used in: "the prophetic message inside me,"[566]or as the "prophecy of compassion" experienced in sleep. Another example tells of the two representations of prophecy in nature, as in this description of a gazelle "I saw the prophetic message in his stance, physique, build, colouring, posture, mobility, and in his eyes, which gazed into the void of eternity, staring at the spirit world, which I could not see."[567] Here we have a version of mythic meaning through which, as Blumenberg has it, "we grasp something that the concept of reality is too pale and general to represent to us."[568] This idea of prophecy, then, is the novel's manifestation of the mythic.

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[565] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 99.

[566] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 59.

[567] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 63.

[568] Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, Trans. Robert M. Wallace, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1990), 76.

For Blumenberg, myth uses "intensification" to represent the mythic or the prophetic. He argues

> The fundamental patterns of myths are simply so sharply defined, so valid, so binding, so gripping in every sense, that they convince us again and again and still present themselves as the most useful material for any search for how maters stand, on a basic level, with human existence.[569]

This "most basic" prophetic level can be represented by the convincing intensity of myth. For Blumenberg, myth is "perennial necessity of human existence."[570]

By the third part of Anubis, experiences of prophecy manifest physically in the world, beginning with the statue built at the oasis: "washed each morning by my master Ragh, it whispered to the sky a secret it had borrowed from my hands, from my pulse, and from my heart, after the secret had thwarted my tongue."[571] In this part, Anubi founds a family, a tribe and builds his temple. He tells of the beginning of the Tuareg race and their religion.

Targa is founded by the matriarch Tin Hanan, who foreshadows: "I will bare you the offspring that will perpetuate the clan of the original homeland […]. From today forward, your offspring your offspring will be the progeny of Targa, and tongues will constantly speak of them, […], a clan of secret. Their true name will remain a talisman among people, […]. All the same, they are a wretched clan, for their destiny is exile."[572] Nevertheless, this origin is only the one known by tongue, because the narrator tells of a secret oasis whose name is unknown and it is the pre-existence origin. Therefore, when Anubi declares that he stops searching for his father for the sake of the lost oasis

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[569] Blumenberg, *Work,* 150-1.

[570] William Bouwsma, Journal of the History of Ideas, (Vol. 48, No. 2), (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/270956>, 347-354.

[571] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 93.

[572] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 105.

Targa, a Ghoul[573] answers him that "the oasis whose name you don't know is real, but Targa is a false illusion."[574]

Tuareg's deferred origins imitate a rather cosmic loss of the first trace of the father. The opening scene of the novel describes a sunrise, but inverts the cycle, so instead of the earth imitating the sky, the sun mimics the desert, "wishing to remain in harmony with the lower world, it seemed, the upper world had mimicked its nakedness."[575] More crucially, this idea of rebirth is perceived as a new awakening (he uses "I awoke"[576] instead of "I was born") gives the idea of the reincarnation of a creature that discovers its new shape with every sunrise. Anubi describes the rebirth moment, "when the clearly demarcated horizon split with the first effusion of the flood of light [...] the last remnants of the darkness cloaking the desert world dissipated."[577]

In fact, the desert in Alkoni is perceived as an entire world that declares its existence outside the rest of the human universe, once an outsider gets into this demarcated place either physically or through his ideas, the desert fights back contaminations for the sake of an integrated survival. Moreover, in the novel's opening lines, the cosmogony is depicted in action: while the sky separates from its beloved earth by daylight, the narrator is reborn in an act of gradual awareness. The narrator uses a poetic language to portray the mythic image of the *time of origins* through his symbolic coming into consciousness. Coming to existence in a sacred space is expressed in Anubi's

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[573] A ghoul is a folkloric monster or spirit associated with graveyards and consuming human flesh, often classified as undead. The oldest surviving literature that mentions ghouls is likely One Thousand and One Nights. The term was first used in English literature in 1786, in William Beckford's Orientalist novel Vathek, which describes the ghūl of Arabian folklore. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghoul>.

[574] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 79.

[575] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 3.

[576] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 3.

[577] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 4.

> Eventually I understood that the birth of light on the desret's horizon that day was not just the birth of an awe-inspiring disk […] but the birth of light in my heart and of a riddle in my soul. […]. The bathing of the desert's body by torments of light was my miracle, and the astonishing game termed "sunrise" by men's tongues was my own awakening.[578]

Throughout the novel, Anubi strives to keep the desert as a purely sacred place. The Sahara of Anubi is completely out of civilisation and modernity whose champions are history and time. The order of things in the sacred space is nature and not culture.

In Anubi's initial chaotic world, he kills his father, the priest or the mouth speaker of the gods on earth. It starts when he defies the tribal order and flees in the futile search for the father. Then he roams in the wasteland of the desert in search for his own identity. He ponders: "I did not feel any bitterness over losing my sense of time nor did I regret losing my sense of time nor did I regret the savor of days; I remember that I stretched out one day in a solitary place enveloped in darkness and slept as I had never slept before, unaware of the advent of evening or the morn of the following day."[579]

This is how Anubi enters a profane space, where everything is grim and harsh, he finds himself utterly alone and abandoned with no food or water and his body heavy. Eliade notes that a space completely void and stripped of all religious concepts cannot exist; as the most desacralized existence will always have traces of a religious view of the world. The sacred space, accordingly, cannot exist unless on the confines of the profane. They alternate in *Anubis*. When Anubi starts the construction of his dwelling,

[578] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 4-5.

[579] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 47.

which is a space that echoes the cherished oasis of Targa, he erects a statue, recalling the trial of archaic societies to seek the sky,

> Finding myself embraced by solitude once more, I sang my sorrows, chanted my loneliness, and in verse questioned my true nature. I was tormented by yearnings for the unknown and attempted to work off my longings among the rocky boulders. I contrived to cut solid rock into a splendid statue and determined to erect it as a land mark, thus satisfying a persistent hushed call in my soul, even though I had never measured to grasp it intellectually. I thought the statue excellent.[580]

The statue that Anubi makes becomes a form of *axis mundi* or a universal pillar connecting heaven and earth and whose base is a way down in the world below. It is a symbolic bridge that renders possible the communication between the underworld, earth and heaven. He sings "[…] the sky, the moon, the lord of light Ragh, and the horizon, which arches to encompass the earth."[581]

For the archaic man Anubi stands for, it is the centre of the universe. The statue then expands in space and becomes a wall, then a temple. As people come to see Anubi's edifice, they bow in prayer and designate it a temple; it has become a sacred space and can be interpreted as an earthly reproduction of a transcendent model, as a religious man would put: "pure and holy cosmos, as it was in the beginning, when it came fresh from the creator's hands."[582]

With the advent of the temple, Eliade discerns an altogether new stage in religious man's understanding of sacred space. A temple was an *imago mundi*, symbolising the cosmos and the sacred order divinely imposed on

[580] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 93.

[581] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 96.

[582] Eliade, *Sacred*, 65.

primordial chaos. In his concluding remarks, Eliade points out that religious man's experience of sacred space differed from culture to culture. However, beneath the differences there was an underlying commonality of experience.

Indeed, the temple of Anubi does not confirm his becoming religious man as it shows that the sacred is part of the human nature. Anubi, in part one, has no intention of settling down and creating a nice shady home. It is the second part, where his act of killing the father announces his entry to the adult world and an initiation act to re-establish the contact with the ancestors. Nevertheless, his sacred habitat is invaded by the profane. One of the caravans invades his established sacred oasis by commercialising gold that can be exchanged for commodities. Gold, the shining dust, brings corruption to the dwelling.

> It can be exchanged for commodities but could also harm people, change enemies into bosom buddies, buy protection, bolster civilization and destroy cities, transform the lowest into highest and the highest into the lowest, subjugate the spirit, enslave other people, overcome any redoubt, and work any miracle [...].[583]

As the worship of gold becomes widespread in the oasis, the sacred space becomes contaminated and loses its sacredness.

The cosmic symbolism of Anubi's city/oasis is crucial in the mythic reading of the novel. "People of the spirit" or *jinns* turn his house into a temple and name its centre by "House of the spirit." It is the same idea of the universe that is created from its centre, as for the archaic societies, which are often founded around a fixed centre. This centre is the *sacred place* that is often erected in a higher position to symbolically reach the sky. The statue and the

[583] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 100.

entire temple are located on the flank of a knoll overlooking the entire oasis and as a witness report everything to the sky.

One of the most important aspects of Eliade's theories is that of sacred time. Eliade shows how in sacred time the "religious man is faced by two types of time, sacred and profane."[584] Sacred time is observed in in "religious festivals," which periodically recreated mythical rituals and "so participating in them meant stepping out of ordinary time and entering into a sacred dimension, the time of origins; and [...] so sacred time was also circular."[585] According to Eliade, as religious man practises periodically these sacred rites, he enters sacred time *illud tempus* or the time of origins.[586]

Thus, sacred time is sacred and reversible as the primordial mythical time made present. The notions of return, circularity and timelessness mirror Alkoni's desert time, "the desert is a paradise of non-existence."[587] Therefore, desert time is equal to mythic time. Alkoni's novel leads up to this very point, where in the end Anubi meets his own son in the desert and is in turn slain by his hand, to mean the end of the old cycle and the beginning of a new one. The mythic concept of the never-ending cycle becomes clear and the origin is perceived as a continual clue to explain existence and to enact a fabulous future.[588] The "return to origins" prepares a new birth, which is not a repetition of the physical birth, but is a mystical and spiritual one that offers another dimension to existence.

The desert, in Alkoni's novel, will always be there, but sons will continue to search for and slay their fathers *ad infinitum*, which leads to a periodically

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[584] <http://www.bytrentsacred.co.uk/index.php/eliade-sacred-and-profane/2-sacred-time>.

[585]< http://www.bytrentsacred.co.uk/index.php/eliade-sacred-and-profane/2-sacred-time>.

[586] <http://www.bytrentsacred.co.uk/index.php/eliade-sacred-and-profane/2-sacred-time>.

[587] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 192.

[588] Eliade, *Myth*, 52.

destruction of the world to secure its new beginning. Nevertheless, if Eliade theorises for these beginnings, Blumenberg argues that origins exist in a liminal space: potentially there but eternally unknowable as "something that cannot be made, as something that, because it could not be invented, is without a beginning."[589] This is likely to justify the first instance of Anubi's existence through opening his eyes, but not born. Thus, his is an awakening rather than a total beginning.

In *Anubis*, despite the denial of the attainability of an origin, the desire for this is so powerful that it fuels the whole story. An origin that leads to identity cannot really exist. Blumenberg argues that this desire to know the first moment is a resistance to the catastrophic sense of contingency in the world. Commenting on the circular movement in myth, Blumenberg discusses the myth of Oedipus, and he shows the inevitability of return to the homeland, though it is catastrophic.[590] According to Blumenberg's reading of Freud, the Oedipus complex "assumes, as an instinctive impulse of infancy, an unexpressed inclination to return home." In fact, in both *Anubis* and the Oedipus myth, turning one's back on the desert by looking for home and fixed dwelling makes the return tragic. In this light, *Anubis* can be seen as adopting and ironizing the themes of the Oedipus myth. While Oedipus and Odysseus teach the inevitability to return, Anubi demonstrates its impossibility. This is how Alkoni defies every seemingly monolithic statement.

The circular pattern inscribed in the stories of Odysseus, Oedipus and Anubi is an epitome of what Blumenberg calls "significance," which is framed "as a defence against indifference […], it portrays life as the self-assertion of a

[589] Blumenberg, *Work,* 77.

[590] Blumenberg, *Work,* 88.

reality that resists probability."[591]Crucial to significance is the idea of "pregnance," which is figured as a sort of life force: "life works against the tendency of a situation to be increasingly determined by probability, against the 'death instinct' as the point toward which the levelling-off process converges […]. Pregnancy is resistance to factors that efface, that promote diffusion."[592] Thus, this pregnancy represents a life force, a sort of eternal possibilities of renewal. This life force is made stronger by "death instinct" that fuels the desire to return.[593]

In *Anubis*, these forces are synonymous with experiences of memory and the absence of memory. Anubi remembers his mother and his maternal land every time he has sex with a woman, "I determined that I would vanquish forgetfulness and recapture that lost life, my true life, no matter what the cost."[594] In the novel, sex with the foreign woman, then, is the return to the mother. A pregnancy experience leads to the return to the pre-natal state that is equivalent of death.

By contrast to the father's image, the mother is figured as desert, land and nurture. In the novel, this idea is announced in the aphorism: "if the father is spurious, the mother is always legitimate."[595] Accordingly, the father as absent container for meaning is opposed to the mother as present reality, a dichotomy reinforced by the patent un-deniability of maternity compared to the unknowable mystery of paternity. This aligns the mother with that "absolute reality," the sun, gazelle figure that illuminates being. While the

[591] Blumenberg, *Work,* 109.

[592] Blumenberg, *Work,* 69.

[593] Blumenberg, *Work,* 89.

[594] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 37.

[595] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 118.

father, the *waddan* or the moon is the un-reachable truth. He says, "We worship what we don't see and only love what we do see."[596]

As the father is one un-reachable real and one symbolic, mothers are also two: one real and true and the other is the Goddess of all the gods in the North African desert, Tanit. In south and west Arabia, the extreme power is in the father of all the gods, the moon. In North Africa Tanit is the goddess Mother of love, fertility and war. It is present in almost all Alkoni's novels. The characters use to recall her name and run to her in a moment of crisis. Tanit is introduced in *The Maggie*, [597]

احمدوا تانيت التي عصمتنا من الغش.

She is also present with her symbol either in the movement of the story or the images described on the stones and the caves. Tanit is part of a collective imaginary and she is sacred for the general creed. She has the overwhelming control of the desert; in one of Alkoni's stories one character is advised to put Tanit symbol on his herd and leave it in an unattended place mid the desert with the certainty that no one will dare touch it.

Desert people depend on Tanit in their work and life; they vow offerings to have her blessings in marriages, in having children and in their commerce. However, as Alkoni shows the human and the animal on an equal ground, birds, for instance, live and procreate thanks to Tanit. In their own way, the birds: [598]

تتوقف عن الغناء وترتفع في السماء في أسراب مثلثة كأنها تتضرع لتانيت لتبارك مسيرتها قبل أن تهاجر.

[596] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 14.

[597] Alkoni, *Maggie* I, 102, "pray to Tanit who made us impeccable." [translation mine].

[598] Alkoni, *Maggie* I, 45, "stop singing and fly forming triangles as pleading Tanit to bless them in their next trip." [translation mine].

With this goddess, Alkoni describes the silenced history of Berbers who adored their goddess of fertility and relied on her support to survive and to recreate its myths through timelessness.

Tanit remains central in Berber history and spirituality. They carry on sacrificing on her behalf and fear her anger. Tanit is not only a goddess to worship; she is the spirit of the desert. So if one angers this Mother of all the gods, he is damned by nature with all its elements of desert, sea, land and man. He then would be orphan and suffer his ordeal until death. Tanit for Berbers is like Inanna in Sumerian mythology, Ishtar in Babylon, Anet in Canaan, Nut in Egypt, and Aphrodite in Greece.

Tanit tells of the matriarchal system of Berbers, Alkoni adds,

> لولا الاعتراف بالفضل القديم لما عبد الصحراويون المرأة ولما جعلوها وريثة لهم في النسب والاسم والميراث من دون كل الأمم الأخرى.[599]

Although this authority of a pagan goddess has been contradictory to the Islamic monolithic creed, Berbers carried on believing in the ancient goddess and vowing sacrifices in her name. They, also, call her the absolute mother and, along with the father-moon, they create a familial balance. She is the collective mother, who creates a secret union among the individuals and between the person and his land. The pagan mother and father generate a feeling of serenity and protection among tribal societies. To Ghanemi, sacrifices are part of the desert economic system that is based on trading and bargaining. The human offers a material thing expectant of a spiritual, a symbolic or even a material gift from Tanit.

In *Gold Dust*, Ukhayyad calls Tanit as an ancient saint of the desert and prays for the safety of his Mahri

[599] Alkoni, *Maggie I*, 111-2, "without the gratefulness for the ancient generosity, desert people would not worship a woman who shares their children's names and to whose offspring authority is transmitted." [Translation mine].

> O lord of the desert, god of the ancients! I promise to offer up to you one fat camel of sound body and mind. Cure my piebald of his malignant disease and protect him from the madness of silphium! You are the all hearing, the all knowing.[600]

In fact, the story is complicated by his vow. He never honours his promise to Tanit. First, he organises and grows a camel to fit to such goddess. Then, he meets his future bride Ayur and is distracted from the sacrifice. Instead, he kills the camel in his wedding and forgets completely Tanit, who sends him many signs to remind him of his duty, through the dreams of the priestess and his continual testing. At the end, he is unable to fulfil his duty towards her as famine takes away everything he possesses, after Italians forced Libyans into their concentration camps. He angers and loses Tanit.

At the same time, Ukhayyad angers his family by marrying Ayur. On his wedding eve, his father sends him a letter saying, "may god curse you for choosing her." The passage of tribe's leadership is based on a matriarchal system; this is why Ukhayyad has to marry his cousin to inherit his father's place. The tribal verdict is clear for the outlaw; he is denied his name and exiled. Because he does not have any protection, anyone can kill him. Consequent to his marriage and his forgetfulness, Ukhayyad loses his father, his tribe and his goddess. He is banned from the circles of protection, the symbolic and the real.

His punishment comes in the form of emasculation. First, he is emasculated when he has really to do it to Ablaq. Second, he is completely disabled by the progressive famine to the point of boiling his shoes to feed his son. At the end, he is emasculated when he gives up his wife to marry Dodo. He last sees Tanit in the cave, where he refuges from Dodo's family that looks for

[600] Alkoni, *GD*, 29-30.

revenge. This is how to behave against the goddess' will is a way to oblivion. In addition, this is how the mythical goddess has survived in the North African desert culture.

Conclusion: The Aesthetics of the Desert and Identity in Alkoni's novels

The concept of magical realism in its specific engagement with post-colonialism has become an increasingly common line of research in late twentieth-century. Magical realism is often set in a postcolonial context and written from a postcolonial perspective that "challenges the assumptions of an authoritative colonialist attitude […] and seek[s] to disrupt official and defined authoritative assumptions about reality, truth and history."[601] Sharing the features of magic realism, postcolonial writers find room to express their view of a world 'fissured', 'distorted', and made incredible by cultural displacement.[602] They combine the supernatural with local stories and aesthetics derived from colonialist cultures to represent societies which have been repeatedly unsettled by invasion, occupation, and political corruption.

In general, the debate on the theory of postcolonial magical realism is dealt with by Slemon, in his "Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse" in Faris' *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*.[603] One of Slemon's central claims is that magical realism, at least in a literary context, seems most visibly operative in cultures situated on the "margins" of mainstream literary tradition. It is an act of breaking away from the Western literary legacy and of resisting its systems of generic classification and assimilation. Slemon observes that:

[601] Faris, *Magical*, 36.

[602] Faris, *Magical*, 36.

[603] Faris, *Magical*, 47.

> The incompatibility [of the established systems of generic classification] with the practice of magic realism—that which makes magic realism a problem case for the understanding of genres—rests on their history of construction: the reading of literary texts of almost exclusively European or United States provenance. The critical use of the concept of magic realism can therefore signify resistance to monumental theories of literary practice—a way of suggesting there is something going on in certain forms of literary writing, and in the modalities of cultural experience that underline those forms, that confounds the capacities of the major genre systems to come to terms with them.[604]

Because magical realism mixes the modern and the traditional, the realistic and the fabulous, the secular and the religious, the sophisticated and the popular, and resists classical expectations of closure and unity, Alkoni's novels, as the previous analysis shows, are filled with many unconventional elements and an original use of language. Alkoni's reader is clearly offered two systems of possibility, one that aligns with European rationality and another one which is incompatible with a conventional Western world-view. Through this duality, a space is created where alternative realities and different perceptions of the world can be conceived.

The possibility of a space with opposite and conflicting properties provided through the deployment of magical realism offers one occasion where marginalized voices can speak and be heard, creating what Bhabha calls "cultures of postcolonial contra-modernity."[605] Mixing the special effects of canonical realism with those of axiomatic fantasy, myths, legends, and superstitions is magical realists' conscious effort to break into the discourse of Europe and the West, and leave indelible traces of a complex culture of

[604] Faris, *Magical*, 47.

[605] Bhabha, *Location*, 9.

survival, a response to "the myths of 'historylessness' or 'non-achievement'."[606]

The issue of space is crucial to both magical realism and postcolonial discourse. The struggle between the "centre" and "periphery" is one of the thoroughly discussed topics when it comes to space and power struggles in literature. Discourses of colonialism position the natives as subjects to be studied, observed and spoken about. The imposed literary, social and political systems of Western culture effectively denied a space in which native voices could express themselves. At most, literary contributions emerging from the "margin" were often described as a variant of the original. For these reasons, magical realism has become associated with fictions that tell the tales of those on the margins of political power and influential society. This has meant that much magical realism has originated in many of the postcolonial countries that are battling against the influence of their previous colonial rulers and consider themselves to be at the margins of imperial power.[607]

At the heart of the emergence of magical realism in postcolonial countries is the fact that those countries saw the imposition of Western capitalism, technology and education upon pre-capitalistic modes of being. Often, such spaces express a content that, according to Salman Rushdie, "elevates the village world-view above the urban one."[608] In other words, magical realism arises out of particular postcolonial societies where old and new, modern and ancient, scientific and magical views of the world coexist to produce an

[606] Faris, *Magical*, 33.

[607] Faris, *Magical*, 33.

[608] Rushdie, *Imaginary,* 277.

aesthetic critical position towards imperial hegemony, by weird linkages and by multidimensional spaces.[609]

In the present work, magical realism is seen as grounded in the beliefs and the point of view of a native North African desert dweller. The desert in the writer's poetic treatment is compared to the sky's immensity and infinity. In this space, the majority of Alkoni's characters are born and grown in a way that makes desert a common mother for them all. For many Arabic critics Alkoni cannot be the representative of their culture as he is dealing with the desert and its people; first, because they do not represent the "true" Arab citizen. Second, they are marginalised Berbers, who live too far from the big cities and their problems, with which the novel as a genre often deals. One of these critics is Walid ben Hmed Althihly, who describes the space as [610]

والمكـان الصـحراوي مكـان متنـاه في
الكبر ومن ثم لا يخضع عادة لسلطة مركزية موحدة، أو تملك، وعادة ما يكون فقيرا إلى
الكهرباء وأسباب التمدن والتكنولوجيا ـ نسبيا ـ وهذا أدى نوعا ما إلى انتشـار الجهـل
والبدع واستمرارية الزمن الدوري في سلوكهم وحياتهم – أي الصحراويين – لأزمنة
طويلة.

Althihly is influenced by civilizational truth, in his statement. His idea is the Nationalist who compares his country to the West and tries to cope with the technological race. He speaks of European journeys through Arabia and insists on the dangerousness of the wild space. In Alkoni's novels, [611] the desert

[609] Rushdie, *Imaginary,* 277.

[610] Althihly, *Aesthetics,* 119, "The desert as a place is so vast to be governed by a central power or to be owned as one says of a land. It is mostly out of electric coverage, it lacks modern-day facilities and technologies. This is why ignorance, fads and the belief in the circularity of time prevail […]". [Translation mine].

[611] Alkoni, *Animists* II, 47, "the desert appears naked and open to the traveller, yet it hides a world so unknown to the jungle or the cities." [Translation mine].

تبدو مكشوفة عارية حاسرة الرأس والبدن ولكنها تخفي دنيا لا تخفيها الأدغال أو المدن.

The mythical *waddan*, who lives on the mountains, is present in many novels by Alkoni. He is the semi-animal and semi-god, most of the times the father figure that left the plain earth to reach the sky, touch its moon and talk to the god or the great father.[612]

لن
يذوق طعم الحياة من لم يتنفس هواء الجبال. .هنا فوق القمة العارية يقترب من الآلهة، يتحرر من البدن ويصبح بمقدوره أن يمد يديه ويقطف البدر أو يجني النجوم.

The *waddan* understands human frailty and teaches people lessons that the desert speaks to him; in a prophetic moment, he sings its words in a bird's paradisiac voice. In alkoni's mythical realist novel, the voice, as a person would define it understandable, can be the one of a bird, *waddan* or Sahara. A stone with ancient scripts has a voice. The winds have their speech, silence, love and war like any other animated element of Alkoni's desert. This equal look at human and non-human prevails in these novels; so that the dimensions separating species are quasi completely blurred.

The protagonists of Alkoni are either transformed into a *waddan*, in a moment of rebirth, or they meet him when he reveals a desert or Tanit prophecy to them. For instance, Ukhayyad is sent a *waddan* messenger in his mountain refuge. Another epitome is Assouf, who is transformed into *waddan* to escape from the Italian coloniser. He and his father have a long story with this mythical creature that conditions their lives and death. Assouf's father tells him of the ancient war between plain and mountain in the desert and their long manipulation of the winds. Indeed, space in Alkoni's

[612] Alkoni, *Animists* II, 9, [translation mine].

novels is treated in either realistic or mythic ways, which is true of a magical realist venture. The moment Italians or Sufis are mentioned, the protagonist is transformed into a *waddan*. True names of the Libyan, south Algerian and Malian desert are mentioned, which accounts for the realist vein of the novels. These moments are disjoined by the magical elements, mainly the mythical ones.

The desert sends its messengers to the protagonists to give them a new birth that allows them to listen to its secret voice and sing in harmony with its natural elements. Thus, "Anubi's destiny is solitude"[613] and [614]

فالعزلة هي السر. العزلة هي القدر. العزلة هي
واحة الأشقياء والوطن الوحيد الذي يليق بالمسكونين.

The oasis, Targa, of Anubi's construction is set around the temple, where lays a statue he creates at a certain moment of solitude. The statue is the offspring of the union between Anubi and the desert; as it embodies the spirit of the space, people react to its presence as a goddess and come to pilgrimage and adoration. However, any settlement is against the nomadic belief, as Alkoni argues in another occasion; Tuareg had the secret law to settle less than forty days in one place, otherwise they would be inhabited by the malefic spirit of the space and would suffer the sickness of settlement. Anubi infringes this natural law and abides to the luxury of settling down, forming a nice shady home and having children.

[613] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 155.

[614] Alkoni, *Khaytaoure's Land*, (Beirut: the Arabic Society of publishing and distributing, 1999), <http://www.nooonbooks.com/reader/pdf/index/bookId/2215/hash/c7dacceacc59a45cc2d9b407c109599491c54de7757e85b9c39e9b0b36b91a42/#page/4/mode/1u>, (22/09/2014, 14:20), 151, "solitude is the secret. Solitude is destiny. Solitude is the oasis of the wretched and the nation of the haunted." [Translation mine].

The discussion of Targa,[615] in the novel, tells of another Targa or the lost *ferdous* or paradise. The idea of the journey as a search for the origin is enacted in Anubi's quest for his father, in the tribe's wander and mourns for the lost oasis Targa, and in the voyage for the lost paradise Waw. This makes the desert tread in Alkoni's novels the kernel and the motif that moves the characters and arouses their feelings. They become eternal travellers who enhance the belief in stability. When Anubi starts the construction of his dwelling, which is a space that echoes the cherished oasis of Targa, he erects a statue, recalling the archaic societies' trial to seek the sky,

> Finding myself embraced by solitude once more, I sang my sorrows, chanted my loneliness, and in verse questioned my true nature. I was tormented by yearnings for the unknown and attempted to work off my longings among the rocky boulders. I contrived to cut solid rock into a splendid statue and determined to erect it as a land mark, thus satisfying a persistent hushed call in my soul, even though I had never measured to grasp it intellectually. I thought the statue excellent.[616]

The matriarch Tin Hanan, who founds Targa, foretells the following sort of Anubi and the Tuareg tribe

> I will bare you the offspring that will perpetuate the clan of the original homeland […]. From today forward, your offspring your offspring will be the progeny of Targa, and tongues will constantly speak of them, […], a clan of secret. Their true name will remain a talisman among people, […]. All the same, they are a wretched clan, for their destiny is exile.[617]

Nevertheless, this origin is only the one known by word of mouth, because the narrator tells of a secret oasis whose name remains unknown as the pre-

[615] Previously I referred to the importance of the word Targa in the history of Tuareg. Here the emphasis is on Alkoni's attribution of the tribe name to the lost oasis Targa.

[616] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 93.

[617] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 105.

existent origin. Therefore, when Anubi declares that he stops searching for his father for the sake of the lost oasis Targa, a Ghoul answers him: "the oasis whose name you don't know is real, but Targa is a false illusion."[618] The lost oasis "Targa" or *waw* plays the same role of the Promised Land, and continues to be the focus of different novels by Alkoni, where characters express their eternal desire to behold it in words of sorrow and nostalgia. Thus, if most of the characters do not remember Targa, their original homeland, though some reject or materialise it by fantasy and dreams, many of them have essential links with the spiritual homeland. The desert as a real enclave and a mystical primordial space becomes a place of rebirth and acceptance of origin.

Anubi's quest, in the novel, starts as a search for the father. The return to origin is a central ideal in many archaic societies as one of the pillar rites of rebirth. He says, in the end of part one of the novel, "Cradle Talk," "I might experience a rebirth in the settlements of the land known as Targa."[619] The longing for origins assumes that any act coming after the authentic one is mere imitation of the ancestors in the first mythical time. The sacredness of the forefathers from the creation time is recurrent in *Anubis*, where words such as "fathers" and "prophets" prevail. The Egyptian and Berber sons of Anubis lost their fathers, killed their fathers and roamed the desert. Their offspring is destined to experience loss and deprival; but they carried on a tradition of renewing by evoking the father. Anubi sings

> I struggled all my life to reach my eternal father in the higher world, but my father would only consent to appoint me his deputy in the lower world. I wrestled all my days to reach him in the heavens, but he chose to appoint

[618] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 79.

[619] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 47.

me sovereign of a dirt-covered foothill over which roam the shades that burden the earth.[620]

The oasis Targa of *Anubis* refers to *Waw*, the lost *ferdous* in Alkoni's long novels: *the Maggie, the Animists, the Magi*… *Waw* is the dream of desert people; it acts as a deferred desire that fuels their nomadic life and animates their every-night feasts of singing, composing poetry and storytelling.

There are many stories of the original Targa, in Arabian myth. Stories of one of Noah's great grandsons[621] are enacted in length at least by Ibn Khaldun[622] and Almassoudi.[623]

نحن هنا أمام أسطورة كاملة لتعليل الأصول في فردوس مفقود، هو ما أطلق عليه العرب اسم "أرض وبار"، الذي كان قبل ذلك أحد أسلافهم الأسطوريين.[624]

This paradisiac oasis is not a "utopic" dream of the "deprived people"[625] as some critics explain. For pre-Islamic Bedouins, this *ferdous* is more an everyday reality than a dream to evade a harsh reality. Tuareg's pagan reality was oppressed by Islam; nevertheless it continued to be part of their rituals. In fact, for the archaic societies, magic bestows a human quality on

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[620] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 99.

[621] Ghanemi, *Epic*, 56-60, [translation mine].

[622] Abd al-Rahman Ibn Mohammad, generally known as Ibn Khaldun, wrote *Muqaddimah*, the first volume of his world history that won him an immortal place among historians, sociologists and philosophers. […]. Ibn Khaldun's chief contribution lies in philosophy of history and sociology. He sought to write a world history preambled by a first volume aimed at an analysis of historical events. This volume, commonly known as *Muqaddimah* or 'Prolegomena', was based on Ibn Khaldun's unique approach and original contribution and became a masterpiece in literature on philosophy of history and sociology. The chief concern of this monumental work was to identify psychological, economic, environmental and social facts that contribute to the advancement of human civilization and the currents of history. <http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/phil/philo/phils/muslim/khaldun.html>.

[623] An expert geographer, a physicist and historian, Masu'di was born in the last decade of the 9th century A.D., his exact date of birth being unknown. He was a Mutazilite Arab, who explored distant lands and died at Cairo, in 957 A.D. < http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/phil/philo/phils/muslim/masudi.html> .

[624] Ghanemi, *Epic*, 57, "The stories are ways of justifying the real existence of the lost paradise that Arabs called 'Wabar's land,' after the mythical Noah's sons." [Translation mine].

[625] Ghanemi, *Epic*, 57, [translation mine].

nature, while religion does the opposite,[626] which explains the place of the promised oasis in their creed. Desert people renew their ancestral life by evoking the lost space and identifying with them by perpetuating their adoration. This paradise is their eternal quest that reckons them in a circular time and place.

In Alkoni's texts, "Waw the great" disappears after a long heavy rain that continued for years. Then, it is followed by extreme heat and suddenly "all the waters evaporated and so did Waw the great."[627]

توقف المطر فتوقفت الأنهار التي ظنها البلهاء خالدة. بدأت البحيرة العظيمة تتبخر ولم يمض وقت طويل حتى سلطت عليها السماء رسولا من الوجود... فاندثر الوطن وتوارت "واو الكبرى" تحت التراب.

This paradise is priceless and incomparable to its people. In *The Maggie*, the chief tells the sage when he comes to cure them from the pest: [628]

يوجد في شرع الصحراء ما هو أنفس من الناموس، أانفاس "واو".

Indeed, they call Waw "the paradise of knowledge" and "the homeland of knowledge." The lost paradise is not really a Berber exclusive myth. Ghanemi speaks of the lost land, in world myth and particularly the Sumerian interpretation.[629] In Alkoni's *The First Mental Adventure*, the narrator describes the Sumerian paradise[630]

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[626] Ghanemi, *Epic*, 58, [translation mine].

[627] Alkoni, *Maggie II*, 301, [translation mine].

[628] Alkoni, *Maggie II*, 64, "In desert creed, Waw's breaths are more important than laws." [Translation mine].

[629] Ghanemi, *Epic*, 60, [translation mine].

[630] Ibrahim Alkoni, *The First Mental Adventure,* <http://www.nooonbooks.com/reader/pdf/index/bookId/2215/hash/c7dacceacc59a45cc2d9b407c109599491c54de7757e85b9c39e9b0b36b91a42/#page/4/mode/1u>. (22/09/2014, 14:20), 238, "In those days, there were no snakes, scorpions nor hyena./ There was neither fear nor horror./ There was "Hopour," the land of the East, the land of fertility and justice; and in Sumer, the land of the South, the place of one tongue, the land of earlier kingdom's laws." [Translation mine].

في تلك الأيام، لم يكن هناك حية ولا عقرب ولا ضبع.

لم يكن هناك خوف ولا رعب.

في تلك الأيام كان "شوبور" أرضالمشرق، أرض الوفرة وشرائع العدل وسومر أارض الجنوب، ذات اللسان الواحد، أرض الشراائع الملكية.

In another reference to Waw, Alkoni alludes to the monolithic texts in their interpretation of the creation myth. Waw becomes the equivalent to Paradise or to the Promised Land. The characters are the great grandfather for Adam, Wantahit for the devil, the snake for women and the devil. Seduction is the arm and Alkoni depicts the scene as such: [631]

الحسناء تغنجت، رقصت، غنت و... مدت يدها وقطعت ورق العشبة... أعطته ورقة فتمنع، وتقهقر، وخاف غضبة الزعيم. لاحقته الحسناء بالعشبة، ولم تكف عن الملاحقة حتى أذاقت الدمية البلهاء لقمة الحرام.

There are several other allusions to the same creation scene in Alkoni's novels in slightly different ways; this one of the Maggie is crucial to the understanding of how the first father lost Waw.

Moreover, Waw is the opposite of the present desert in its harshness and destruction. What is important about Waw is that it is part of the desert, or a lost paradisiac desert within the desert, which is a pride for Berbers who believe that the desert is the mother that hides its secret and that they will be rewarded by Waw for their perseverant and infinite walk in love for their land. It is the way to adorn their past and to recall their origin. Alkoni is the North African writer who shows his fear of the extinction of one of the ancient cultures. He fears for the Stones with early scripts or the messages left by ancient humanity. He fears for the desert to be contaminated by the

[631] Alkoni, *Maggie I*, 364, "the coquettish youth flirts, sings and dances […]. She gave him a leave, he refuses and retreats for fear of the chief. The gorgeous girl follows him with the herb in her hand and she never stops before the idiot doll tastes sin." [Translation mine].

greed for gold. He fears for the desert for its fauna and flora, its Berber names of the winds and sands. Susan Mchugh comments on Alkoni's efforts to preserve a human heritage saying

> At a rare speaking engagement in the US in 2011, al-Koni himself ventured some answers as he explained the origin of these scenes by recounting his own remarkable journey to view the Tassili images, which though difficult to date are estimated to be at least 10,000 years old. Noting that the petroglyphs are supposedly protected as part of a UNESCO World Heritage site and located nowhere near any modern battles, the novelist recalled asking at the time why the carvings obviously had been defaced by bullets, only to learn that in recent years some of neo-colonialist dictator Muammar al-Qadhdhafi's soldiers had intentionally shot at them.[632]

Alkoni denounces the "artistic defacement" or the tremendous act of 'destroying the heritage of mankind, a message from mankind to mankind' sent from ancient people. This 'killing humanity', and 'not just humanity, but also plants, animals, and stones' is what Alkoni's quest highlights in the North African desert. The three novels put forward a culture that persists beyond the genocides and extinctions of its colonial history. To McHugh, Alkoni's novels are "gaining scholarly and worldwide recognition as sites of a singularly grotesque genocide, in which tens of thousands of people were forced to watch as the animals, they depended on for transport, food, even companionship in this extreme environment, perished of starvation first, fully aware that their own deaths were sure to follow."[633] In Alkoni's desert, Berbers do not have pets in the form of *waddan*, gazelles, camels; they are rather bound to desert life with other magical ties; a magic that goes beyond reality and history.

[632] McHugh, *Hybrid*, 15.

[633] McHugh, *Hybrid*, 16.

Alkoni's work is the magical realist postcolonial writing, though postcolonialism is embedded in magical realism; and their meeting point is space. Susan McHugh cites,

> Like many contemporary writers who draw from animist traditions to emphasize local perspectives, he has been embraced as a 'magical realist' by postcolonial literary critics, who point to the scene cited above as evidence, for instance, of 'successful act[s] of political resistance' brought about through 'supernatural' forces.[634]

Contrary to what might be suggested by his being more acculturated by the West than some of his fellow Arabic writers, Alkoni develops a complex aesthetic alternative to the linear ideology of European and Arabic literary realisms by giving free rein to his Berber collective imaginary and mythology. Alkoni's alternative suggestion makes possible enlarging the dimensions of reality and altering the ways of rendering postcolonial history through the employment of an irreducible element of magic.

The irreducible element of magic here is contingent upon extending what is historical and real to something fantastic and magical, but deeply rooted in North African Berber culture and desert images. Through a mythopoeic rendering of events, that used to be mere reality, has become unreal. The desert is the land of the spirits that manifest in words and become crucial to cultural survival; though living as the ancestors seems to be eradicated by a powerful present reality. That look in the moufflon's eyes where Assouf sees his father, in his agony, is the language that humans and animals use to communicate. On the other hand, the brotherhood that unites Ukhayyad to his piebald goes beyond the concept of "representation" that reality is centred on. The story of Anubis as one of the oral stories, for which Alkoni travelled throughout the North African desert to collect the different pieces,

[634] McHugh, *Hybrid*, 8.

enables fiction to stretch beyond the Arabic and Western definitions of the Berber Maghreb in the absence of written records from pre-Islamic North Africa, which has meant a complete absence of history and art and allowed the colonisers to consider it a barbaric and uncivilised space. These oral stories suggest that art is not only the written manuscript but it goes beyond the fixed features of Western conception of fiction.

In addition, the invocation of the myth in Alkoni's novels enhances their universal qualities. Since the barrier between the real and the fantastic world is blurred, spirits are so close to man that they get involved in the Saharan life: they tell Anubi the truth about the priest's identity; they introduce him to sexuality and manhood self-discovery; and they predict his offspring's sort. Therefore, throughout the trilogy, Alkoni's writerly capacity tends to suggest that *jinns*, *waddan*, gazelles, stones and lost oasis are as valid as historical events in forging the sense of the world and reality. But whereas desert people show no sign of amazement when spirits take part in their daily lives, they are astounded by the beauty of the outsider women and their capacities, even a date offered to Anubi becomes of special effect.

Though the three novels are inspired from a North African mythical context, social and historical reality is never abandoned. Colonisation, for instance, is present in the distribution of arms from the Italian and the American officers to Cain. One more instance is when the American John Parker uses his Western intellectual capacity to understand Sufism and the way he separates between knowledge and material greed in his interaction with the desert. Indeed, Alkoni deploys all these elements to strike upon the theme of Western destruction of the colonised space; and mainly the way human beings stripped of their humanity, including the American John and the Libyan Cain, become threat to the human race and its treasures.

The arms, here, contest the desirability of the modernization that colonisation brings through. The new web of colonial and modernising elements forces desert-people to join world's definition of progress. Gold, in *Gold Dust*, is the oil that overturns and upsets desert life, where greed erases the ancient footsteps of the ancestors. Clearly, then, instead of bringing progress and development, the recent colonial ways have deepened the North African crisis of identity and direction. When Ukhayyad, Wan Tahit, Anubi and Assouf oppose these new ways to join history and prefer to join their fathers in their quest for the lost paradise they face an atrocious death.

In more than eighty manuscripts, the writer tries to rewrite desert people's past; using Arabic, he joins one of the colonisers who deprived Berbers of language, poetry, stories, laws, social organization, art, myth, sculpture, abstract conception, and philosophy. Unwittingly, the Arabic overwhelming and long presence effaced Berber from creation as the area is perceived immediately as an extension of Arab world. In his novels, Alkoni provides a long list of Berber aspects of life that colonisation distorted including time, names, rivers, mountains, towns, religions, customs, and the world of spirits. The three novels are, thus, set in the historical reality of Libya in the twentieth-century. The word Libya is, in fact, never mentioned in any of the three texts. Nonetheless, there are several references to politico-historical events that directly or indirectly correlate with the actual development of the country.

Alkoni's novels are more than a traveller's physical journey through a space; they depict the desert in its mythical, historical, transcendental and cultural values. The challenge is to write the desert beyond the senses of modern tourist or visitor, who would see a demythicised and empty space and explain it by science, geography and history. Blumenberg and Eliade believe that myths do not disappear and continue to exist. Myths serve many

functions in Alkoni's works and play a major role in the construction of the collective identity of North African Amazigh. They are pivotal to understand nature and phenomenon. Mythical language also unveils signs and symbols and helps grasp the full knowledge of the desert beyond time delineations. By understanding the secret language of the desert, Alkoni's reader participates in the process of ritual recreation converted from his novels' events and characterization.

Unlike the majority of Twentieth-century Arabic literature that pictures cities or rural countryside, as Western poetics did, these stories show the outside world a less-known reality of the desert in postcolonial Libya. The ability of the writer to make the invisible things visible takes a mythic grandeur, when Alkoni's image becomes half mythical and half historical. This can be more importantly taken as a metaphor of the fundamental role of the postcolonial writer's "duty towards historical veracity when the memory of events is so frequently warped to serve base political or economic interests."[635]

At the time Alkoni published his novels, Libya was ruled by overpowered politicians, a guardian of the ancient stone who finds his own identity in the recorded history by the physical evidence of the stone becomes a prey to the greedy modern unlimited consumers who chase him around, like they do with animals, slaughter him and finally bleed the stone, as ancient tears over the lost desert. Violence, used by the outsider and the insider to reach their objectives, mirrors the political era in which Gheddafi ruled Libya. The present occupies a critical place in Alkoni's conception about the state of Libyan politics. But as Gheddafi banned, exiled and assassinated anyone who

[635] Jean-Pierre *Durix, Mimesis*, *Mimesis, Genres, and Post-Colonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magical Realism,* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), 126.

opposed him, even his family members or his friends, Libyan writers, and Alkoni was among them, often had to criticise without pinpointing.

As Assouf and his father, Alkoni chose exile to write exclusively of his homeland and his Berber people from a distant place. Alkoni's message seems to be that North African nations are fated to ceaselessly repeat the past because they have not done enough to make any decisive progress by recreating their past. They remain subject to infinite colonisation. Colonisation, also, may be said to have played a major role in disabling the colonised from taking a position in the flow of history but in their actual stigmatized underdevelopment.

Moreover, the cyclical recurrence of the events responsible for North Africa's distressed condition, account for Alkoni's pessimistic vision; as his forefathers foreshadowed the disasters of introducing gold or oil economy to Libya. By making Assouf and Ukhayyad die tragically, because they defend their ancient beliefs, by the hands of flesh-eaters and blood-seekers who deny the coexistence of spirits, Alkoni suggests that reconciling the spiritual and physical dimensions is far from happening in North Africa. Yet, there are many indicators of the survival of traditional Berber societies and cultures. Pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial histories interact and mix with the mythical and the magical to underscore some fundamental traits of North African desert life and worldviews, bringing up a rich dialogue between Western and local ideologies and aesthetics. Alkoni's literary imagination reaches its full potential in this dialogue as he tackles socio-realistic and geo-political issues each time in varying forms and styles, demonstrating that the vitality of Berber folklore, mythic tradition and aesthetic sensibilities are inimitable and hard to be colonised by the literary conventions of the colonial centre.

Thus, within the arena of a magical-mythical worldview, Alkoni's novels demonstrate its ambitious scheme to disengage itself from the commonplace unity found in most Arabian realistic texts, a unity believed by many to be complicit with the hegemonic drive of Western discourse. Magical realism of Latin American literature offers a theoretical background to Alkoni's novels, yet not in a reductive way. His postcolonial mythical perspective treats paradigms of historicity imposed on North African desert by both the Western and the Arab worlds in a trial to give voice and manuscript to an ancient Berber myth.

III

Conclusion: a Comparative Reading of Bowles and Alkoni

> "A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing."
>
> Martin Heidegger, 'Building, dwelling, thinking'

The present study has applied a post-colonial perspective to the different representations of the meeting space between East and West occurring in a series of fictions on the North African desert by Ibrahim Alkoni (*The Bleeding of the Stone*, *Gold Dust*, and *Anubis*) and Paul Bowles (*The Sheltering Sky*, *The Spider's House*, some short stories and translation). This perspective has been very useful to the delineation of literature as a possible place of comparison, in which the representation of the self and of the Other is a concept of utmost importance. The analysis has, in particular, allowed to highlight the fact that the strategies of literary self- and hetero-representations, as epitomised in the works previously considered, have been used in a broader sense and beyond the classical dichotomy: positive representations of the "I" / negative representations of the "Other." Indeed, the presence of the "Other" in North Africa is as much chastised as the native populations' attitude towards nature and culture. In addition, the perspective of analysis applied in this study allows hypothesizing that the literary production of the two authors has followed a course at the same time divergent and convergent. These are the main issues we intend to discuss in the framework of our comparison of Paul Bowles' and Alkoni's fiction.

Drawing upon Bowles' short and long fiction in this chapter, our focus is again the key short text "A Distant Episode," his novels *The Sheltering Sky* and *The Spider's House* and his translations of Moroccan tales.

We have already shown how Bowles' biographical details are re-enacted in his fiction. In the early fifties, Bowles wrote *The Sheltering Sky*, where a

group of Americans, Port, Kit and Tunner (like Bowles, his wife and another friend) disembarked on the Algerian shores to explore the North African desert. It was an evasion from what he presented as the rigid system of the United States, where "civilization had turned and begun to devour its own body."[636] This trip changed his life and his writings, which were centred on that space. Most of Bowles' stories are set in what Mary Louise Pratt calls a "contact zone,"[637] where differences blend into each other. From the Swiss mountains, Alkoni narrates his Berber stories. His Berber people live in a double marginalisation: the one of the North African Libya and the other of a minority within an "Arab" nation. Distance and space issues are the backbone of Alkoni's novels. The two writers have different cultural backgrounds and different perspectives in dealing with two different North African states. At this point the question is: do the differences really blend into each other in Bowles' and Alkoni's text?

In Bowles' fiction and non-fiction, this question is addressed in terms of debate on identity. Bowles' first short story and novels, as demonstrated in earlier analysis, deal with the desert as an alien landscape. The events and the characters live through shocking experience and extreme violence. A particularly compelling example is Bowles' "A Distant Episode" where, as a result of cultures failing to come together, he represents an apocalyptic view of a Westerner professor's failure to explore the desert, where he meets doom. Indeed, Bowles' early works expose the perils that the Western 'I' projects onto space. The tortured body of the professor of "A Distant Episode," the infected corpus of Port and the loss of Kit in *The Sheltering Sky*, are all carved into space.

[636] Bowles, *Without,* 95.

[637] Campbell, *Dialogic*, 3.

The cost of meeting the Other for Port and the professor is death and insanity. The Professor wants to be in both places at the same time, to operate between here and there, between home and desert. But, his intention fails owing to the impossibility to linguistically conquer linguistically the space. In these stories, the professor's search is parallel to Port's and Kit's, and Stenham's. In all these stories, except for Stenham, meeting the Other is destructive. These texts highlight how the sense of an essential identity rooted in a place of origin is threatened by moving in the Other's space. This feeling of modernity, as destructive of spaces, is dominant in Bowles' writing and closely connects his works to identity theories. Modernity contaminates the authentic spaces and transforms nature, land, raw materials and people. Bowles expresses feelings of grief through the character of Stenham; he introduces his passion for Morocco admitting, "When I first came here it was *a pure* country. There was music and dancing and magic every day in the streets."[638] Indeed, Bowles' idea is that "mass society" will only reduce the world to a "cultural vacuum", a "malaise that will sink the world further into boredom."[639] This feeling is shared with Alkoni who comes very close to that of Bowles as he travels up the desert into the heart of North Africa, collecting myths and data, and abhorring the globalising factor that makes all people the same, debased world that emerged from the war. Bowles writes:

> [The natives,] who with their blind intuitive wisdom had triumphantly withstood the missionaries' cajoleries, now were going to be duped into joining the senseless march of universal brotherhood; […]. The new world would be a triumph of frustration, where all humanity would be lifting itself by its own bootstraps – the equality of the damned."[640]

[638] Sawyer-Lauçanno, *Invisible*, 324, [italics mine].

[639] Foltz, *Paul*, 102.

[640] Foltz, *Paul*, 252.

In *Gold Dust* and *The Bleeding of the Stone* Alkoni speaks of the disastrous impact of modernity and cultural invasion that threaten the ancient heritage of the desert symbolised by the animals like *waddan* and *piebald*, the plants like *assiyar*, its gold dust and its stones that speak the first human language. The Sahara of *Anubis* reacts to modernity and its fundaments, history and time, by imposing its circular time of the eternal return and triumphing nature over culture.

Alkoni shows his fear of the extinction of ancient cultures. He defends the Stones with early scripts or the messages left by ancient humanity, the desert from the greed for gold. He glorifies the desert richness in fauna and flora, Berber names of the winds and sands. Alkoni condemns the "artistic defacement" that he describes as "destroying the heritage of mankind, a message from mankind to mankind"[641] sent from ancient people. The stones, animals and plants, sent as a message from humanity's forefathers, who teach us to preserve mother earth, are destroyed by a culture based on greed and the accumulation of wealth that comes with colonisers or neo-colonisers (as Susan McHugh describes Gadhafi's soldiers). In Alkoni's desert, Berbers do not have pets in the form of *waddan*, gazelles, camels; they are rather bound to desert life with other mythical ties.

Indeed, while Bowles warns of a devastating modernity, Alkoni's tone seems to be more gloomy and pessimistic. While Stenham and Lee flee the war and the chaos of the encounter Orient/West, Assouf is slaughtered as a potential *waddan* on his sacred stones. While the professor of linguistics loses his exceptional mental capacity and humanity because he exposes the natives to his highly modern means of communication and experimentations,

[641] McHugh, *Hybrid*, 6.

Ukhayyad sells his half-brother Ablaq, his wife and son for a small amount of gold dust, forced by colonisation to give up his honour to survive.

For Alkoni and Bowles, the threat of losing a human landscape, in which originality and authenticity lay in its being native, is lurking in different forms. If for Bowles, Stenham and Port, the minimal adherence to the West, even by studying its philosophies (as Nationalists do) means introducing disorder and uprooting a system of life; for Alkoni and Assouf, the Italian archaeologist is a brother in the temple of belief. This latter kneels in front of the stone like Assouf, whose father taught him that the old priest of the stone was the god of his ancestors. Indeed, Alkoni expresses his disdain for modernity, whether oriental or occidental, when it destroys the past stories, the ecological system and nature, but he glorifies art and myth when they come together.

In *The Sheltering Sky*, in one of his exploring tours, Port discovers "a small ruined building," where an old man dwells in solitude and "built a shelter."[642] In his excursion on the mountainous desert with Kit, Port sees an old man from a distance; after hours of love, talk and sleep, the old man, who has become a shadow during sunset, is still there. In all these narratives, the past is depicted in a process of decaying, a marginalised shadow in abandon and solitude.

Bowles' nostalgia for the past is an act to dismantle the present. This explains his love for Morocco and Moroccans. For Bowles, tradition is the way to win over a destructive present. The seeds of his exploration of North Africa start with the professor in "A Distant Episode" and *The Sheltering Sky*, where he discovers the desert as his French or English predecessors would have observed the space as void and peril. The exception, in *The Sheltering Sky*,

[642] Bowles, *SS*, 131.

comes with the second protagonist, Kit. This latter, after Port's death, harmonises with the desert, in which she symbolically bathes naked by moonlight as a way to embody the space. Then, she chooses to follow a caravan and explore the heart of the desert using her body to be a naturalised nomad. She is disguised as a man to liberate herself from gender limits. By becoming the concubine of Belqassim, she lives the life of any native woman. Nevertheless, Kit does not speak with Belqassim. She loses her linguistic and intellectual capacities. She puts off the cultural ornaments and reduces her being to nature. Just as Alkoni glorifies nature as the logic of the desert, Kit stops being a cultural being and gives free rein to nature or to desert.

The Professor's and Port's journey into the desert, Stenham's in Fez, Ukhayyad's exile from his original tribe and adventure in the colonised land, and Assouf's encounter with the neo-desert-man Cain and the Western men highlight the cross-cultural encounters between cultures and civilisations that have become an even more urgent preoccupation in the years since Bowles' and Alkoni's works appeared.

In "A Distant Episode," the professor ventures in the south of Morocco, to study variations of Moghrebi. He is a linguist who studies the languages of an oriental country, thus he is Orientalist. Furthermore, he speaks English, French and Moroccan, crossing thus the linguistic boundaries of one nation. The professor's identity becomes problematic as he has no name or nation and his being is reduced to his quest. Freed from his past and other identities, the professor is similar to Bowles, who travelled in search for an identity of his own construct. Bowles is the novelist who undertakes a trip into the sphere of the Other. However, they end in different ways. The professor dies symbolically, because his being is limited to his profession, and by losing his intellect he loses his life. Port dies of typhoid signalling the peril of venturing in Other's space. Stenham flees his beloved Morocco, the symbol of authentic

being, and joins the West that he had evaded for a long time, his trip is failed. Bowles stays in Morocco and witnesses the radical change of a space that he admired as pure and uncontaminated by Western modern ethics. “In Bowles' later work these dialogic encounters become central as the cultures hybridize through his translations and stories.”[643] What Bowles did in the last decades of his career was to surrender his Eurocentric position of the Orientalist[644] to call his work of writing down Moroccan oral folktales, translations.

In his writing, Bowles is affected by being the Other to himself, in the process of losing the identity of the author to reside in a position in-between the writer and the translator. Bowles' authorship, in his late writings/translations, reveals his undecidable position. In the ambiguous identity of Bowles’ translations, Bowles’ translations place him in an in-between position as they invite the reader to try to distinguish between “oral” and “written,” “colonial” and “postcolonial,” and finally I and Other. Bowles’ translations blur the differences in fusing writer and translator.

Bowles’ fiction is a political act, designed to give floor to the Moroccan natives, allowing him to speak his ideas. In this way, Bowles breaks with the Anglo-American tradition of silencing third world subjects and questions the mastery of Western languages. Bowles gives his storytellers a central position compared to his as a translator. It is the opposite of the colonial literature, where the natives are often marginalised; while the Western speaker is put in a position of an all-knowing of the colonised subjects.

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643 Campbell, *dialogic*, 182.

644 I avoided this term from the start because the Maghreb is not the Orient, though there is a tendency to believe it is. In this context, to my knowledge, there is no other alternative term that covers the academics, who work on the Maghreb.

Bowles' ambivalent position as translator/author shows the fusion of different genres and different languages and makes us reflect on Bowles' hybrid authorship. By being non-Eurocentric in his approach to writing the North African space, he gave away part of his identity. The professor's being is reduced to his intellect and by losing his mental capacity he enters a mysterious space. Bowles is the American novelist, who chooses to give his position to natives to produce a hybrid work, where cultures meet and Moroccan oral stories blend with Western writing.

The representation of the Other, in Bowles, parts from a Western perspective to dive into the native world. His fascination with North African myths fainted as they gradually lost their authenticity by adhering to a distorted mimicry of Europe. Bowles' characters give free rein to their adventurous nature, in a space that they considered violent and doomed. Their quest of fascination with and desire to meet the Other lead them to explore the unknown and die. Kit is an exception in her relation with the Other. She embodies both the desert, as nature and man; she becomes the Other by disguising herself into a Tuareg man. As a postmodern character, Kit is a problematic character who dissolves the boundaries between races and genders.

The Other, in Bowles, moves from the margins to the centre of his stories. The native is no longer a secondary flat character, as it is represented in *The Sheltering Sky*. Already in *The Spider's House*, the novel is divided between a Western protagonist, Stenham, and Amar the native Moroccan. Gradually, in Bowles' translations, native Moroccan storytellers become authors.

Bowles performs the complete exposure to universal experience. His work is freed from ethnic discrepancy by adopting space and adapting it to his writings. His characters witness a gradual decolonisation from the Western

cultural dictates. As Lindsey Moore expresses it in different terms, "Both aspects of Said's contrapuntality – a critical counterpoint that might adhere in a decolonizing body of writing and a critical rereading of the colonial canon – are vivified in the Bowles corpus and his collaborations."[645] Moore puts an emphasis on the way Bowles, as the last of the colonial travel writer, paved the way for "a Moroccan postcolonial cusp."[646] In the difficult realm of "telling the other,"[647] Bowles looks for a universal "I" that is timeless, homeless and politically free, a space in-between the I and the Other.

If Bowles' work progressively foregrounds the image of the native Moroccan against the background of Western representations of the Oriental culture, Alkoni writes his novels, inspired from texts of different origins. Alkoni's intertextuality, references and metaphors inform of his extensive and diverse culture, which shows a thorough knowledge of the Koran and the Bible, ancient and modern literature, and philosophy and Eastern wisdom. Alluding to universally acknowledged texts, Alkoni puts his novels on a universal scale and makes the desert the origin of wisdom.

Alkoni's others are the coloniser, the arms seller, the outsider to the desert, and mainly the character who threatens space. Alkoni's Other is difficult to define; because his protagonist is the mythical desert of authentic wisdom. Because Alkoni's texts are out of history, his treatment of the Other is less foregrounded than the one we explored with Bowles.

In fact, the desert embodies for both writers the origin of wisdom and sublime aesthetics. The stones, in *The Bleeding of the Stone*, are met by Bowles' portrayal of the tea in the Sahara, in *The Sheltering Sky*. On the one hand, Port's quest in the Sahara aims at conquering a lost authenticity. Using

[645] Moore, Modernity, 104.
[646] Moore, Modernity, 104.
[647] Moore, Modernity, 104.

a transgeneric technique of incorporating painting in fiction, Bowles makes the tea for the three dead women in Marhnia's account analogous to Port's quest. The story of these women is intricate and central to Bowles' novel. Like the protagonist, they set themselves in a quest for the authentic scenery. They spend their lives dreaming and working hard to realise their vision of having tea in the Sahara. Once there, they have their last tea and die, a Bowles' Biblical allusion that makes this last scene as eternal as the last Supper. The painting of these dead girls generates a feeling of emptiness and terror. The portrayal of the girls reveals the essence of Bowles' quest for authenticity in the desert. Indeed, the desert is authentic because it is free from the rational mechanism of Bowles' idea of the West.

On the other hand, the stone, to whom Assouf dedicates his life, is a proof that there was a far past of myths, saints and rites of sacrificing in the North African desert, where the painting takes place in the narrative to depict: "At the top, the image of the god was set into the body of a large stone. Its neckless head sat directly on the torso. Its enigmatic features suggested it had been worshipped for millennia. […]."[648] In the ancient message, Assouf finds the stories of the "ancestors with giant stature."[649] These stones carved by the ancestors open Alkoni's texts on timelessness and unknown authorship. Assouf knows that these stones preserve the desert secret and mystery that once revealed would curse the whole space. Alkoni informs us: "Every single thing the eye beholds, in the desert, carries a prophecy."[650] Therefore, the stones speak a desert language that is addressed to all humanity. The stones are also ancient art coming to the present. In fact, it is one of the main mythic elements, around which characters meet as a symbol

[648] Alkoni, *BS*, 28.

[649] Alkoni, *BS*, 90.

[650] Alkoni, *BS*, 112.

for the beginning of humanity, "Through thousands of years it had faced the merciless sun, adorned with the most wondrous paintings ancient man had made anywhere in the Sahara."[651] Thus, Assouf embodies the Sahara in his name like Kit embodies the nature of the desert in the end of *The Sheltering Sky*.

The universality of the message on the ancient stones in Alkoni's novel is confronted by Bowles' dismantling the limits he poses on the North African desert in *The Sheltering Sky* in his later translations, where he annihilates the fixed grounds of meaning and authorship. Thus he is no longer the author, but he becomes part of a new collective author together with a group of storytellers and his work becomes a collage of dispersed images of lost Morocco. In fact, Bowles' writing on the desert is a way to create many centres; it destabilizes an old Western representation by giving free-play of meaning.

Although the postcolonial themes are present in both Alkoni and Bowles, it is approached in different ways. One of the concepts present in the literature by Bowles and Alkoni is timeless space. Timelessness of the desert takes part in the general framework of the ex-colonised space. Indeed, the coloniser qualifies the space to explore as a geographical part of his world map that needs his signs and tools to be defined, and hence it is studied from a Eurocentric point of view without considering the native's perception of their own land. In the colonialist discourse, the desert is emptied from inside.

In Bowles' texts, timelessness is present in the idea of the aesthetics of the authentic living, or the people in their individual approach to a different living from the one he loathed in New York. For instance, in Fez, observing the ritual of the feast of sacrifice or *Ith'ha*, Bowles' interest in tradition and

[651] Alkoni, *BS*, 2.

myth becomes evident. Indeed, Stenham penetrates the Moroccan ancient city's timeless world. The sacrifice of the sacred animal is a mythical act that humanity had observed in different ways, before it became one of the Abrahamic devotions in monolithic religions. What attracted Stenham to this ritual are the theatrical as well as the collective "need to achieve ecstasy."[652] The natives, in their simple life, achieve the collective happiness that is absent from his New York life. The dancing that continues "day and night"[653] creates a kind of mental state of voyaging through time, in countless moments of "trance" being. Bowles cherishes the same timelessness that the natives realise by recreating the timeless myths. In his biographies, as we saw in earlier analyses, Bowles penetrates this dimension of the absolute being by resorting to *kif* and *majoun* that help him dissolve the confines of reality and myth, history and timelessness. In his fight against consciousness, Bowles fights his identity and shares the natives' mental experiences of sublimating real life and evading the constraints of consciousness. Through trance- dance and drugs, he joins the natives in experiencing liminal spaces, where mortality collapses into a timeless and a spaceless being.

Bowles' representation of the North African desert in *The Sheltering Sky* offers another interpretation of space timelessness in a feminine adoption of the land and its culture. Kit's embodiment of Mother Nature is another example of West and Orient fusing in the desert. By freeing her mind of all the traces of Western civilisation, having no idea of the Maghrebian one, Kit penetrates the timeless dimension of the desert. Indeed, Kit becomes the Sahara, where she wanders aimlessly and survives instinctively. To achieve total blending with the space, she has to lose her Western logic, for mind is

[652] Bowles, *SH*, 151.

[653] Bowles, *SH*, 151.

the emblem of cultural hindrances. Kit attains oneness with nature. She chooses alienation in the other's space or a completely physical blending with the African. She embodies the desert's openness on infinity. On these occasions, Bowles joins Moroccans and dissolves his identity in-between presence and absence, consciousness and trance, being American and Moroccan, the eternally travelling settler, the 'I' and the Other.

In Alkoni's work, timelessness means the circularity in time, a past that returns continuously in the present as an act that defies temporality. With Alkoni, the Maghrebian novel is rewritten from a Berber desert perspective. In *Anubis,* the aphorisms revive the ancient Berber ancestral wisdom in the present. The aphorisms are timeless voice of desert people that Alkoni writes down to highlight the timeless qualities of the space.

Furthermore, he depicts the North African mythical reality. In these stories, Alkoni foregrounds the human-animal-object brotherhood as a timeless mythical dimension. In fact, the *waddan* is once the father of Assouf, in the scene where the mythical animal saves Assouf; and this latter sees his father in the *waddan'*s eyes. On another occasion, Assouf is caught by the Italian coloniser; he is transformed into a *waddan* and escapes. After this mythical metamorphosis, Assouf is worshipped as a saint by desert people. The stone is another example of brotherhood; Assouf talks and prays in front of the ancient stone that talks of one of his ancient gods. The same happens with Ukhayyad, when he looks for the 'Lord' of the desert to pray for the safety of his half-brother Ablaq, in a cave of ancient stones and paintings. These stones add a timeless dimension to Alkoni's novels. The origin of the Tuareg tribes is attributed to Anubi. He drives his offspring to loss and nomadism in the Sahara. He is the ancestor, who announces his continuous renewal, in the present. The notions of return, circularity and timelessness mimic Alkoni's

desert time, "of non-existence."[654] In his novels, Alkoni teaches us that desert time is equal to mythic time. The mythic concept of the cycle becomes clear. The "return to origins" prepares a new birth, which is a mythical approach to existence. Alkoni's desert is always-already there, but its sons will continue to search for their fathers, animal or object brothers, and new awakenings *ad infinitum*.

Another element of rebirth and timelessness, we saw in the chapter on Alkoni, is water, particularly bathing and drinking in the well, as a mythical allusion to the Bible and Koran. The same happens in Bowles' text, where Kit bathes in oasis water and moon reflection, before she starts her final journey in the heart of the Sahara. Water is linked to the idea of motherly womb and rebirth. The bath, where floating is the main action, is the moment of Ukhayyad's rebirth. It is extended over the circular form of the *Wadi,* where Assouf spent a whole night floating between life and death, and the heart of the desert, where Anubi is lost and reborn. The concept of initiation from the abyss represents amniotic diving for a return to the origins of the world. Thus, in these novels, this ritual rebirth is associated with a particular experience in primordial times. This healing experience takes a mythic tone in the Sahara novel.

At this level, the fiction offered by these writers is also mythical. We have gone further in addressing the idea that there is no belief in two post-colonial worlds in the North African desert, one real/Western-like and the other insane/supernatural/Oriental, but in one naturally mythical world. This principle then implies that reality extends towards the invisible where the "supernatural" is in symbiosis with daily life. This denies a certain

[654] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 192.

parallelism between two worlds that cohabit without meeting, but the dimensions of the same world whose limits are difficult to determine clearly.

This idea sums up what we've seen so far, in particular the mythical representation of the desert as it appears in the novels. Following these observations, it becomes clear that talking with *jenni* and encountering a *ghoul* dissolve the limits established between realism and fiction. These findings lead to an interesting observation: the postcolonial magical realistic novels by Alkoni and Bowles are realistic because they speak of the two Western/Oriental realities of the North African identity. The novels are also realistic because the real world explains the mythical one and vice versa.

This is mainly a feature that differentiates Bowles from other Western writers and Alkoni from other Arab writers. The desert that is embraces as the authentic living in Bowles meets the absolutely mythical desert of Alkoni. The interest in myth shows a hypothetical ideal and reality of desert culture. In fact, "solitude" for Bowles blends with the "secret" in Alkoni. Solitude, in Bowles' fiction, is the protagonists' ways of refusing to settle down, building families and adhering to social and cultural dictates. Port's quest is directed towards absolute solitude, as opposed to loneliness. Port is deeply "[touched] by solitude and the proximity to infinite things."[655] In her last journey, Kit opens up her soul to "The wind at the window celebrated her dark sensation of having attained a new depth of solitude."[656] Another reference to solitude is in Bowles' quotation from Kafka: "From a certain point onward there is no longer any turning back that is the point that must be reached."[657] Indeed, the Moresby's exile and their desire for "singularity,

[655] Bowles, *SS*, 37.

[656] Bowles, *SS*, 74.

[657] Bowles, *SS*, 113.

solitude, estrangement, and alienation" are highlighted as a part of their individual salvation in the Sahara.[658]

Escaping from the loneliness in the metropolis, Bowles and his protagonists consider solitude in the desert as liberating and authentic. Bowles' quest for his ideal of authenticity in North Africa is, indeed, the quest for dissolving identity and these two constructions overlap in the writer's fiction. The old Morocco, which is lost in Nationalism and colonialism as epitomised in *The Spider's House*, becomes one of the lost dreams in Bowles' and Stenham's mental map. In a parallel way, in his act of becoming half-translator half-writer, the Western narrator's role shrinks to give the floor for natives. What Bowles deserted New York for, an originally "medieval" North Africa, as Fez and the desert are described in *The Spider's House* and *The Sheltering Sky*, where Nationalists', Lee's and Tunner's strong will to modernise it, becomes a space of pervasive violence. In his translations, Bowles stages his encounter with the mental and local space to foreground the sense of loss and solitude in the desert as a space of war between timelessness and violent reality.

Violence is another element that Bowles and Alkoni base their novels on. Shocking, breath-taking are the violent scenes, in these novels and short stories, where tongue-cutting, decapitating, and knifing characters are the bloody end of every story. Through evil and violence, one notices the way Alkoni's texts address humanity and seek universality through anchoring the theme of violent death. Indeed, violence and death are recurrent in Alkoni's work. Accordingly, the protagonists face death to defend their space. It is a necessary death that may contribute to a certain awakening and awareness of the cultural genocide that threatens human cultural treasures. The writer presents desert quest as a death experience that aims at securing life.

[658] Caponi, *Paul*, 1994, 8.

Alkoni's text is also a space of the encounter of cultures, myths, history and disciplines. Nevertheless, violence is everywhere in Alkoni, so killing the Other is often part of survival. Death has no centre and becomes part of living.

Bowles, also, dissolves the belief that focuses evil and violence in one entity: coloniser, colonised, Muslims, Christians…; it is perhaps human nature that rejoices in blood and culminates in death. In the start, the desert is perceived as the "land of terror," where ecstasy is enjoyed in death and massacre of the Western travellers. Then, the "pornographer of terror," as Leslie Fiedler likes to call Bowles, paints his space in scenes of extreme violence and sadism: tongue severing, bathing in blood, strangulation, group rape, forced sodomy, fights, and "a landscape of nightmare."[659] Bowles' "Violence! Sweet violence!" is echoed in his stories and translations. In Bowles' texts cultural, social and psychological oppression makes up for the violence perceived in the North African space and set against the desert as liberating, pure and authentic solitude.

In Alkoni's novels, Anubi and Assouf choose 'solitude' in the desert. In his contemplating exile, Anubi quests for his own father and identity. Solitude is one of main themes in the novel. All along his life, Anubi faces solitude; sometimes accepting and other times rejecting it. Solitude feeds the spiritual need for the desert. It is part of the mythical ritual of acceptance in the Sahara. It purifies desert people from their past as a rite of rebirth and renewal. It is the magic effect of the desert on the traveller's psyche. In *Anubis*, the play is on loss of the Other/father/tribe/oasis and regain of self in solitude. This duality of material and spiritual being is in close relation to

[659] Aldridge, *Paul*, 188.

space, "for the body, the desert is a place of exile, whereas for the spirit, the desert is a paradise."[660] Spiritual life is regenerated in the desert.

Anubi finds peace in solitude that becomes part of his being. In Alkoni, there is a recurrent movement in the desert as a way to free its Bedouins from the entailments of settling. Fixity kills the spiritual quest of Bedouins and materialises being. Anubi unites with the spirit of the desert and sings his own loss "Finding myself embraced by solitude once more, I sang my sorrows, chanted my loneliness, and in verse questioned my true nature. I was tormented by yearnings for the unknown […]."[661] Solitude as a discovery of one's identity is what initiates Anubi to his new god-like role. Thus, "Anubi's destiny is solitude"[662] and as Alkoni defines in another novel, "solitude is the secret. Solitude is destiny."[663]

In the same way, Alkoni's characters face solitude as part impartial of desert life. As any work drawing on the tradition of legends and folktales, Alkoni's novels, in general, are built on the confrontation of the opposites such as body and spirit, tribe and solitude. For the sake of refuge from the human world, Assouf chooses a place full of celestial visions and ghosts. He shows no interest in the material world that threatens his people: stones, caves, *waddan* and gazelles. According to the ways of the desert, everything has a shape and a spirit. In solitude, Assouf communicates with the spirit of the surroundings. In their solitude, Alkoni's characters step into another dimension of the desert, which offers peace for the lost and the exiled.

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[660] Aldridge, *Paul*, 172.

[661] Aldridge, *Paul*, 93.

[662] Alkoni, *Anubis*, 155.

[663] Ibrahim Alkoni, *Khaytaoure's Land*, 151, [translation mine].

Indeed, in their search for North African desert, Alkoni and Bowles find in 'authenticity' and 'myth' the right source for their theories. In one of his collection of thought on the desert, Alkoni announces: [664]

وجودنا لغز لا يكتمل وجوده الآ بوجود الثالوث: الرواية، الخلاء، الأسطورة.

Alkoni defines writing novel as a recreation of myth[665]

غاية الأمر في أساسه هو قول الأسطورة. غاية الرواية أساسا خلق الأسطورة، أو فلنقل ان نية الراوي الأولى هدم البادیات من أساسها، وبناء البديل خارج المكان بمساعدة الأسطورة.

Thus, the quotation from *My Great Desert* serves as a good foundation to develop a claim of Alkoni's uniqueness or difference from writers of magical realism. In fact, myth is the term that Alkoni states in this extract and has major significance of what writing novel means to him. It allows him to go beyond the Western concept of magical realism and to clarify and overcome the orientalist belief in an exotic desert reality of the,. The exact term that qualifies Alkoni's writing and mentions the timeless and the spiritual space without involving the Eurocentric hierarchy is perhaps "mythical realism" to which may be added "North African."

The novelists skilfully blend historical, supernatural and ethnographic realisms and therefore propose, in writing, a double look at the North African space. The term "exotic" is merely the product of Western eyes; while mythical realism is a realistic, rational and mystical look at desert. Mythical realism is a term that can express a vision of Alkoni's desert. Indeed, this

[664] Alkoni, *MG,* 122, "The secret of […] being is comprehended in fusing the following trinity: the novel, the void and myth." [Translation mine].

[665] Alkoni, *MG,* 122, "The aim in writing a novel is to construct myth and to dismantle prefixes. The myth of space is possible only in mythical language. It is telling myth from myth sayings and creating myth from the creation of myth itself." [Translation mine].

expression contributes to illustrate a North African desert identity that goes from traditional animism to universality.

Different to Bowles' work, in Alkoni's North African mythic realism, the descriptions of space is possible by the development of a traditional African animist belief for which all things animate or inanimate have a soul. Indeed, in Alkoni's novels, as in the traditional animism, reality is crowded by real spirits. It is a world in which there is more than a mythical realistic effect. The personification of the elements of nature offers an important link to identity. Indeed, Alkoni gives a soul to nature and a spiritual life to all its elements: a stone that speaks a prophecy, a *waddan* messenger, and an animal that communicates, teaches and dictates respect for its own species are few instances of the natural world in a parallel life. He establishes a communication between man and nature, and so he creates this kind of intimacy between man and space that makes the North African desert identity. By this personification the North African space is filled with those original myths and can acquire its own soul with which man talks in his continual journey; instead of facing the void, he has particular physical and spiritual encounters.

In Alkoni's work, a representation of magical nature is introduced in a particularly intimate way to humans. His novels propose a hybrid being, as if men belonging to a space took the qualities of the nature of the space on their own skin. One sees the hybrid Anubi and Assouf in their metamorphoses, half-human and half-animal, the concept of a non-specifically human nor animal as a mythical force that dissolves the confines between species. Alkoni, at this level, dissolves the traditional conception of identity beyond ethnic debates towards a universal consideration of nature and space. He no longer bases his ideas on his native land; though he starts

from his own space, he adapts his myths to a universal issue of man and nature.

In this respect, Susan McHugh locates this debate within the "interdisciplinary strategies of animal studies" contribution to the revival of what was previously considered "the simplistic hallmarks of primitive forms" like myths and folktales. She argues

> Reversing this trend by outlining a means of intervening in the parallel 'metaphor model' problem within anthropology, Rane Willerslev reframes animism in terms of an 'indigenous metaphysics' that deeply unsettles 'ontological certainties', and therefore signals an opportunity for 'critical dialogue' concerning 'theories of knowledge',[…].[666]

McHugh offers another revolutionary reading of Alkoni's representations of desert people based on new 'theories of knowledge.' In Alkoni, there is another power, a more universal vision that hints at a desire to opening from the individual to the universal instead of focusing on a unique experience. This is clear in Alkoni's interpretation of desert knowledge as source and origin of human wisdom, as McHugh observes, "Al-Koni's development of a historical theory of the Sahara as the cradle of civilization, and of his own tribespeople – 'among the very first of history's "first peoples"– as the inheritors of humanity's ancient past…"[667]

Accordingly, Alkoni depicts 'cross-species transformations' to establish new desert beliefs that reveal the urgent reaction to eco-cultural genocides or 'mass tragedies' as McHugh puts it or another critique to the modern human-animal struggles over a space that has become a "terrific… source of drama"[668] and a theatre of an ongoing struggle of modernity against ancient

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[667] McHugh, *Hybrid*, 6.

[668] McHugh, *Hybrid*, 9.

witnesses in the spaces that are still uncontained by modern political settlements and fixity. Coming to a close, Alkoni's quest in the North African desert culminates in suggesting ancient original and authentic systems of lifestyles, based on a total belief in nature and desert man in his struggle for survival wearing an animal mask as a sign of hybrid being.

The hybrid space in Alkoni's and Bowles' fiction dislocates the unidirectional meaning that conceives of the real as a unique world. For this reason, the narrator of *The Spider's House* depicts two protagonists and presents many different opinions about Morocco in the same novel to put forward a pluralistic way of thinking. The duality of the author and the translator, in Bowles' translations carries on the idea of hybridity started already with we called in earlier references by dual protagonism. In *The Sheltering Sky*, Kit disguises into a Tuareg desert man. By doing so, she symbolically displaces the dualities of Western/Oriental, man/woman, and polis/desert.

Bowles' characters and translators are torn between past and present and between the desert behind and modernity ahead, which suggests their hybrid identity. The ambivalence stems from the complex relations between Bowles as writer and translator, adding to that the idea of living in Tangier the interzone. His position as author over translated oral stories in a modern written form is questioned previously and we came to the conclusion that Bowles's work lays in a place between the author and the translator, an interzone, bordering two different edges, the past of orality and the present of written text, and a space of negation and acceptance of both the "I" and the "Other." Bowles' translations place him in an in-between position as they invite the reader to try to distinguish between traditional and modern, oral and written, here and there, colonial and postcolonial and finally I and Other. Bowles' translations are hybrid as they break rules and blur differences.

In the same way, Alkoni's intense description of the desert, with its clash of interests and nature evoke a world of differences. Indeed, the hybrid nature of space becomes evident when the twentieth-century North African desert becomes the arena where the supernatural happenings and the historical events come together in a natural way. Myth and reality belong to one world. The desert, accordingly, exists at the intersection of interchangeable and mutually interdependent worlds. It is the outcome of fusing the linear time of history and the circular time of myth. According to Bhabha "postcolonial location and representation" is a reaction to logo-centrism, and to the politics of binaries.[669] This implies questioning cultural imperialism by creating new spaces between the known spaces, by mixing modes of narrative representation of the Western tradition with the native tradition and its oral genres.

Furthermore, the evocation of hybridity in the novels we saw announces the co-existence of different cultures and belief systems existing in a puzzling antagonism. Bowles stages the conflictual relationship mainly between native and Western systems in his novels and short stories; yet he decentralises the idea of conflict into sub-conflicts that is rivalries within the major ones. Amar, the native, struggles with the European presence in the "Spider's House"; he has different and violent discussions with his father, the symbol of tradition, his friend, the nationalists and women, Poly as the main figure. Stenham, on the other hand, is the Westerner, who struggles with his motherland, his European mates and the Moroccan nationalists. There is no centre where point of view lays unique and pure.

Alkoni stages the puzzling antagonism in terms of foregrounding the desert as pure existence against the background of modernity, colonisation, change,

669 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (Routledge: 1994), https://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/bhabha/location1.html, (9/4/2014).

history and cultural threats. In sum, these writers agree, without knowing, on the deconstruction of violence, conflicts, and identity.

The contact zone of the North African desert with Western modernity is, according to Bhabha, in "the third space."[670] It is a liminal space, where syncretism becomes a possible way to reconcile conflicting elements of different presences. Accounting for the deconstructive element in defining identity, Said signals that no culture "is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic."[671] In this respect, the writers of the desert found another brick in the process of the hybridization of space.

Anubis highlights this idea where Anubi, the time eclipsing character, tells the circular history, the past, present, and future of Tuareg tribes. Anubi tells of past events and how they cause a backward-looking future, because the fate of Tuareg is already known to him. Moreover, the repetition of the rites of rebirth and death from one generation to another, the continual insatiate search for the father and the endless conflicts that involve all Alkoni's characters strongly suggest the cyclical movement intrinsic in the sense of time in the desert.

As well, in Bowles, the characters' repetitive quest for identity seems to establish a sense of time with a cyclical feel. Trapped in the desert, cut off from the outside world, Port's and the professor's constant travelling begins with a hopeful note and ends in death. Kit's journey ends in losing her mind. Stenham's search for authenticity culminates in disappointment. This representation of characters' struggle with time may be described in terms of continual return and circularity. Thus, the novels we explored present

[670] Bhabha, *Location*, 210.

[671] Said, *Culture*, xxv.

certain patterns that challenge the concept of a definite universal history. Interestingly, the hybridity that characterizes characters, time and space constructs a plural, collective and mythic identity.

The last element that accounts for the cosmopolitan identity of these writers is borrowing from universal cultures. By this act they blur the cultural limits imposed by colonial and postcolonial nationalist writers who seem to opt for sharp division for the sake of a pure identity. These novels are caught in ambivalence on the tensions between the international recognition of cultural difference, and a local refusal of novelty. While Alkoni is urged to demonstrate and celebrate local, intimate desert ways of being uncontaminated by European influence, his cultural background brings him closer to European culture. On his turn, in his early writings Bowles explores the Maghreb so as to praise Western civilisation; yet he demonstrates his full engagement with the authentic space. In their emanating contact with Western culture, on one side, and with the traditionalists, on the other, they both work on a hybrid identity; and so, they intellectually meet in the hybridised space. Thus, these writers commit to the shifting space, negotiating contradictory and antagonistic cultural elements and opening up a space for migration and hybridity beyond the given grounds of opposition.

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